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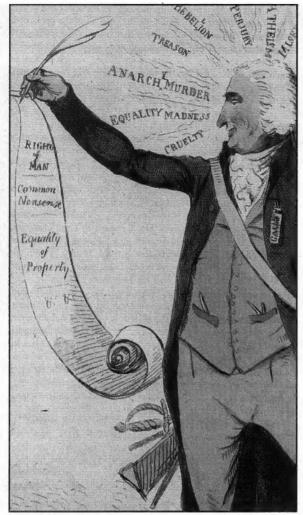
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A magazine is the nursery of genius."

Tom Paine

BRUTARIAN NO. 48/49

Spring 2007

Brutarian Quarterly, \$4 an issue. Cheap for such a work of unsurpassed genius. Cover Illustration by Chris Krolczyk.

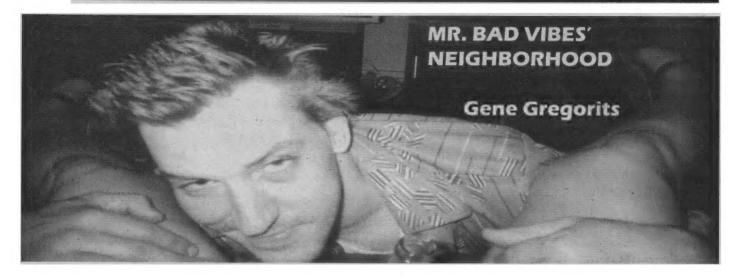
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BRUTARIAN 48/49

Movie Reviews....



Two's and Fews

"I'm going down, to the underground...
as deep as I can go."

-Primal Scream

After spending most of that morning drinking beer cans out of a dirty sock in a soup kitchen, stranded on the streets of Portland with only fifty dollars, I'd seen more than a day's worth of misery and woe. None of this talk was recorded, because the night before I'd lost both my microphone and my batteries. I walked for over an hour, finally locating the address of one of the bums had given me. He referred to it as "the trasvestite bar," apparently the only place open at 10 AM. Inside, there was this gaunt black man, an amphetamine addict and convicted killer named Bobby, sitting at a small table with Beth, a prostitute. The bar was quiet, the proprietor still flipping switches and taking chairs off tables. Its neon sign wasn't even flashing yet.

I sat down with them and ordered a round of drinks. The glasses set before these ragamuffins were drained quickly, and neither of them spoke until two more full ones arrived. He was fresh out of prison and she had lost track of her friends. Sometime before dawn, they'd met at the bus station and decided to stick together until one of them found a place to go.

I offered to buy a piece of Bobby's costume jewelry, a "ghetto fabulous" silver rope-chain, in exchange for an interview. He agreed. The three of us found a Radio Shack, where I purchased another cheap microphone and more batteries. On the way to the strip bar, Beth vanished with Bobby's speed. This angered him; he had been promised a blowjob.

As we walked in, I was stopped dead in my tracks by the sight of a fully naked woman dancing on stage, feeling that it was far too early in the morning for female pubic hair. A hot flash surged through my extremities and Bobby said "GOD DAMN."

We found a table, sat down, ordered. I did a quick test of the equipment, and began. I'd found the heart of the underground at last, in Bobby bared bloody teeth and animalistic motives, stripped of form but not grace, the passion of the hyena, trapped rats and other creatures with every last shred of domesticity robbed, the false faces burned away, all mannered lies beaten and raped into extinction, no sympathy for the weasel, hardcore existence, hot existence, pure ART. This was the level to which all arrows pointed. I wondered at first, while Bobby spoke, why the streets weren't filled with the most brilliant and malnourished outlaw creators of all varieties, and it came clear: the work is hard and dangerous, the kind of work Herbert Huncke and Neal Cassady knew, later to be transcribed and translated and transmogrified, by more civilized others. Bobby had the soul of an artist, and separated from a typewriter,

an easel, a camera, or a guitar (all things meant only for the pawn shop), he left his mark hanging in the air, the evidence in a phrase, in a physical gesture, in a violence both frightening and pitiful, stories written on the Northwestern wind, his *life*, which to me, somehow, affirmed everything.

As deep as you can go.

APPX. 12 NOON (All Live Nude)

BOBBY: I describe how it looks to me. It may not look like that to the next person, because I have too many problems with the next person. Me and the next person

have *never* seen eye to eye.

GG: But you understand what I was saying though? B: Of course I

understand you.

GG: Why are you even willing to talk to me?

B: I wanted to talk to you because an interview is an experience that I have never indulged in before, in my lifetime.

It's just an experience for me. I'd like to know how it feels. I'd like to see the outcome of it. It's a roll of the dice. Suppose somebody gets ahold of this and likes it. Or they go and they read it and they don't like it. Still a roll of the dice.

GG: I'm going to give her a dollar. I'm going to give her *five* dollars.

B: No man, you crazy? Give her one.

TAPE CUTS

GG: Would you mind saying hello? NUDE STRIPPER: Hello.

GG: Wow.

TAPE CUTS

GG: Where did you grow up? B: South Central Los Angeles.

GG: You mentioned the Hell's Angels.

B: I'm into them because I know a lot of them, a lot of

red and white. I get along better with them I've found, in my later years, than I do with my own people. There are people who think I'm lying...

GG: The Hell's Angels are racists. You also mentioned getting along with Klansmen.

B: I say it like that but I mean it like this: any man that looks me square in the eye and goes straight to the bottom line, and push the line like he's supposed to... and not give me no bullshit, I *love that*. That is the best understanding that two men could ever have.

GG: He still hates you for very ignorant reasons.

B: Every man is entitled to his own opinion. If he wants to spend his time living in the dark end of the world, that's him. As long as it don't infringe upon me, and my rights, upon my security and my peace of mind, he can do whatever he wants.

GG: Seems like too often, it takes the black man to be the better man in a lot of situations, in an argument. Heh heh heh.

B: I never consider it the better man in an argument. I feel like *too much* argument is a load that I shouldn't carry.

GG: Not to sound like some kind of bleeding heart motherfucker.

B: No, no. But listen....what I mean is, I don't wanna oscillate back and forth. I wanna modulate in the smoothest way possible, that I can. That means getting along with everybody, and kickin it with everybody, regardless of what they feel like deep down inside. You're not supposed to let that show *anyway*. You keep that to yourself, that's your own personal idiosyncracies. I don't look in the mirror with a closet full of skeletons.

GG: You're a beautiful person. Hey look, she's taking off her panties!

B: Ohhh, man!

GG: Check that out. What do ya think?

B: What do I think? Why, I'd go up in there quick as I could draw my ass back. Oh yeah. She is fine.

GG: That's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

B: You spilled your batteries.

GG: Fuck it, don't need'em. Already loaded.

B: She's not the most beautiful. She is very beautiful, but now, understand *this*. Let me re-iterate. Oregon has the most beautiful women in the country. They pick the models from here.

GG: Don't think I'm being rude if I look away while you're talking.

B: And don't mind if *I* look away. Because I can *do* two things at one time.

GG: Me too! And I am, right now.

B: Ha ha.

GG: I just threw her five. I can't afford that.

B: Well, I'd have thrown her five if I didn't have only five left.

GG: Well, I'm buying the beer tonight. Well, today! What time is it?

B: Quite early. 12:30, 1 P.M.?

GG: What about crystal meth?

B: My opinion of drugs and shit like that? I feel like this. A lot of shit is supposed to be on the down and low. Only a fool would just put his business out there in the public. There's things that the public just don't understand. The public is confused. Some of them may like what I do. Some of them may *not* like what I do. Some may want to persecute me and prosecute me for what I do. Others? They pay it no mind.

GG: How many years did you do?

B: A total of 33.

GG: Your last stretch was for killing someone, and also for shooting a police officer.

B: (pauses) Yeah. Yeah, I did. I killed the one man, and I wounded a police officer.

GG: What about prior convictions?

B: One conviction was under the Lynching Act, when I took my buddy, who was a prisoner of the *police*, and I took him out to my car, with a gun. They charged me under the Lynching Act. One incident was a robbery. Another was assault on a police officer. At the time I was out on the Sunset Strip, with a bottle of whiskey, packin a gun. Someone saw it and they called the sheriff. The sheriff showed up and I was so loaded I didn't even know that I had the gun out. It was tucked in my

waistband. Friedman suit. You know, I'm sharp. This is how we used to dress in the old days. You know how those OGs dress now? The tennis shoe generation? We did not feel comfortable in tennis shoes, with our pants sagging down. We had been through that with the khakis. I'm losing my train of thought here.

GG: Me too. TAPE CUTS

B: This gonna sound strange to you homey, but I haven't loved in so long, I been through so much in these prisons, that I *lust*. I lust, I don't love. I feel less than a man if I have to love, unless the woman is contributing deeply.

GG: Being honest, you mean?

B: Gene, check this out. Women is gonna be women. I don't give a damn if she-

GG: How do you know a good one?

B: All of them are good. They just gon' do what they do, and you gon' do what you do. You gon'go thirty years in the same marriage? Fuckin the same woman? Your wife? NO. So when she do it? Don't trip. If she smart, she'll do it when you don't know.

GG: So you don't believe in there being the "right girl." I guess you think that's all nonsense.

B: Look. All women are beautiful, within their own right. If one is not beautiful in one respect, than another will be beautiful in that respect. But you have to look down deep, to see that beauty in some women, sometimes. But they are all the same woman. They're gonna do what women do. How you gonna stop the nature of a woman? It's like trying to fight against the natural laws of nature. That's why there's so many babies buried in the monastaries, with the monks and the nuns. That's them trying to fight against that natural law. They go and do their do, and they have to cover it up.

TAPE CUTS

B: Why don't we just try to catch them at a time when they horny?

TAPE CUTS

GG: I'd rather not deal with that. I'd rather just make it up. Lie.

B: That's your program. If that's what you wanna do, do it. If it's making your world turn, then it's a tool that you need to use. Do your thing, like I said.

GG: Shot of whiskey?

B: No, I can't drink hard alcohol.

GG: Me neither.

TAPE CUTS

GG: All men have masochistic tendencies. Any man who goes to a bar and watch naked women while torturing his liver with booze is a masochist.

B: Well, I don't know about other men, but for me, sex under the influence is the toughest thing I ever went up against.

GG: No it ain't.

B: Then again, women should be a man's *hobby*. Not his muthafuckin *life*. Not his livelihood. Not his fuckin leaning post. They should be his *hobby*.

GG: The world puts you in a position, I think, where you are forced to perceive women as dangerous.

B: The world don't put me in shit. I do what I wanna do. Bitch can be with me if she wanna be with me, if she don't wanna be with me, then break wide. That's all I can say. Myself? If I see a shady bitch, and she's fine, and I wanna fuck her, I'm gonna scheme to fuck her. But after I fuck her, I'm goin. If I have fallen in love, then I'm gon'fuck her again. But then I'm gon'fuck her till I fall out of love. If I see one I wanna settle down with? It don't make any difference what the bitch is. She could be a hooker. In fact, I would prefer a hooker, for the simple reason that a hooker is not going to be enticed by a pretty car, or a nice house, by a diamond ring. Hookers done had all that shit. They done rolled in Rollses and Benzes. They done had that shit, you know, and ten foot anaconda dicks. So when a hooker love a square motherfucker, she really in love with him, from her heart. She's not looking for nothing that he can give her.

GG: That's a tough scene. I don't think I could deal with a hooker. I'm too petty. I'm into that sugar and spice crap.

B: Then what you need to do, is get yourself another world, next to Wayne's World. Get yourself another one, next to his.

GG: You calling me an idiot?

B: I'm sayin, basically that it's never gonna happen. I hate to say that. But then again it would make me feel kinda small to say that what you're sayin is not real. You do have *some* women like that.

GG: But they're nowhere! (laughing)

B: You see that, huh? See, I can't stand no bitch that just wants to fuck only me.

GG: Heh, heh, heh.

B: A bitch that wants to do nothing but wait for me to get home. Bitch, you better go get a boyfriend.

GG: You do realize that we are both insane? Look at that! Four feet away. If we were sane, we would ignore the law, and jump up on that fucking stage and get as good a feel as we could before the cops showed up. We are perverting our natural urges, because the law is perverted. It says that women can be naked four feet from us, but unless we're stinking rich, we can't fuck them. I think that's sick. We're crazy people.

B: What? You talkin about touchin the bitch? I would rather run up there and lick the crack of her ass.

GG: Then why not stick your tongue IN her ass? I mean, while you're down there, why fuck around? Kind of a waste of time, otherwise.

B: See man? I KNEW you was a muthafuckin *freak*! I knew it would come out sooner or later. (laughing) Because it all comes out in the dark, don't it?

GG: It does. So what happens to you when you do meth? I'm an ex-coke freak myself, so I'm curious. You turn into a sexual demon, right?

B: I see that little funky ass cocaine runnin through people, drivin their asses fuckin *crazy*, and there's no tellin what they puttin in that shit. Listen, the thing about muthafuckin *speed* is-

GG: I gotta switch the tape over. TAPE CUT

GG: Ziggy played guitar. Go on.

B: Sorry about spillin that beer man, but you just buyin way too much beer at one time! I mean, this whole *table* is filled with beer.

GG: That's how I do it. I'm insecure. I like to have plenty around. Look, if I can have a table full of beer, and \$40 left at the same time, I'll think about where I'm sleeping *later*.

B: Look man, this forty bucks thing? I don't believe it for one second.

GG: It is, man! I was in a fucking soup kitchen all morning. They knew I needed help. And now I'm here.

B: Well, if it is true, then I suspect that you gotta be one hustlin motherfucker.

GG: I have to be. Who the fuck would ever give me a

5

credit card?

B: But you don't have to hustle. I can tell, you have a fuckin brain, and a good one homey. You have a very, very high IQ.

GG: I wouldn't know anything about that.

B: Well, maybe not, but when it come to scrappin for it, you gonna have yours. You gonna get yours one way or another. You play on a higher level than I do. I'm what they call a dusty hustler. I ain't no big ol'hustlin motherfucker. I pick up twos and fews.

GG: HAHAHA!

B: I may pick me up a hundred or two a day, that's all. Because I'm a pussy.

GG: That puts you one hell of a lot further ahead than me.

B: I'll get my party material, whatever that is. It's done easy. That's it. But with *you*? I look at you, youngster. Look here. This muthafuckin world *is yours*. All you got to do is bloom like the muthafuckin flower you supposed to be.

GG: That was given to me as some kinda password this morning.

B: What?

GG: That word you just said. "Bloom."

B: Well isn't that somethin. Co-incidental? Probably. Maybe it's in the makins. Maybe you gotta bloom. Right now, I can see that you are torn between two worlds. You could be one vicious, savage motherfucker if you would just *let them bitches alone*. Don't try to be right to no bitch, be yourself. And if a bitch like you for yourself, then that's where you be.

GG: Women think I'm crazy.

B: Most motherfuckers I know is crazy. Every bitch I know is crazy. Evidentally, if you tryin to be up there in the wrong circle, and you are not mainting a level of happy medium, then let that shit alone. Johnny Cochran can't function as a motherfucker. If he tried to function below his level, as a traffic court lawyer, he'd starve to death. Maybe you just functioning below your level. I can tell, you like this gangster shit out here.

GG: Well, you can call it gangster, it just seems more honest to me.

B: Well, that's what gangsters are. We are true to ourselves. We true to what we believe in. I'm not sayin, "show no allegiance to the next son of a bitch." That's your fellow man. Your fellow man, you treat him with

common courtesy. You my fellow man. We sittin here breakin bread together. Just because that motherfucker over there, at that next table, just because he black, he's not my fellow man. I'm true to my game. If the money fall out of his pocket, and I can get his wallet, I'll get it. Like I say, I'm a dusty hustler. And if you get stupid, I'm gonna get you one day.

GG: If I got stupid, I'd deserve it. I have it comin to me as it is.

B: If folks can see that you are acting not in accord with yourself, and that you is doing foolish things, then that would be the parting shot. I would break wide. But as long as your cap is on, and you thinkin proper like you thinkin, let shit alone. Let it blow. Because man, when I first saw you? I looked and I said, well, this guy right here, he sharp. You know why I said you were sharp?

GG: WHY? (laughs)

B: Because you came with *gifts*, muthafucka.

GG: (laughs)

B: Gifts that didn't mean nuthin to you, but gifts that would win muthafuckas OVER.

GG: What gifts? I don't remember giving any gifts.

B: Ohhh, man. You gave money. Cigarettes. Beer. To strangers, you didn't even know. You took'em out. And what you did was, you established a foundation. And once you established that foundation, you bound yourself to us sayin that you could walk it. And I believe that givin the right situation, if it wasn't a nigga like me? You'd end up runnin shit. But now, of course, I'm gonna let you run shit too. Because I'm gonna let you make the money also.

GG: What money?

B: Any money you can.

GG: There ain't no way you could possibly think I'll get penny one for this interview.

B: No.

GG: No. Exactly. *No.* But that's because the (laughing) general *public* does not appreciate quality.

B: What I'm sayin is, you could go out there and get some drunk bitch to *like* you. And wanna give you her lane. You done made *that* money.

GG: I always fuck it up with women. But so what? This interview is turning into something all about me, now.

B: No, it's not about you. Let's say it's about me. I'm

not the one with the hangups. Either I'm gonna go to church...or I'm not, man. It's as simple as that. If he treat me any other way than as a thief in the night, I'm gonna try and cheat him. That's just how I am. But I'm not a dirty motherfucker. There's loyalty among thieves. There's loyalty among us gangsters. There's things that we won't do. Period. Some of the things we won't do, we won't do because we have that respect. Some of the things we won't do, we won't do because we fear that this motherfucker is gonna put a bullet in our heads. Black people is like that. White people ain't like that. Y'all just jump up on one another and beat each other up with some horseshoes or some shit.

GG: HAHAHAHA!

B: We don't do that. We plot, we lay and scheme. Maybe that's why I don't get along with my own kind a lot. Because we some *spiteful* muthafuckas!

GG: (still laughing)

B: We can hold grudges for like *twenty years*. It's like, nigga, HOLD UP! Can't you see this is fifteen years ago? Let that shit alone. But we don't have that kinda sense!

GG: You're fuckin crazy, man! You're outta your fuckin mind! HAHAHAHA!

B: No, you LOOK. I am *not* out of my mind. I'm just puttin the hard line down. If I *really* told the truth-

GG: The Red Sea would part.

B: -muthafuckas just wouldn't want to hear it. It'd just remind them of themselves. You understand me?

GG: (laughing)

B: You understand me, you jackfoot, nig hip, pot smokin muthafucka? Who thought you was my friend? You sucka. I been lookin at your wife and shit, tryin to steal her jewelery, tryin to get into your bank account. Everything, you understand me? You white dudes all be together, and when y'all don't like each other, y'all just smash each other with a fist, upside the head or somethin. And that's the way it goes. But black people, we somethin else. We don't do it like that. Me? I live in Portland, and I'm out here in the streets, right? Because I love these muthafuckin streets. My daddy was a streetrunner. You know what? When my brother-before he died, Eroll Jr.-I was-hey, that fuckin thing on?

GG: No, you want me to leave this part out?

B: No man, leave the shit on. I just didn't see that red light on there?

GG: It aint working, apparently.

B: It was workin!

GG: It just came back on. We got all this, don't worry.

B: You see, I said I wasn't used to it, but you done used some more of your trickeration on me. You turned it around where I couldn't see it.

GG: I'm kinda funny like that.

TAPE CUTS

GG: I'm in the bathroom alone. I'm gonna read what's in here on the wall of the bathroom. It says "Extenders." We have a selection of fine rubbers. First on the menu is "Slo-Boy." Then, oh here's a doozy. The "multi-extender ring." Hey come on in, don't mind me. Third is, "Midnight Stalker." Thrill her with fingers of passion! Try all six in rotation!

TAPE CUTS

GG: 21st Century Boy. Bolan sucks.

B: I came in because I wanted to see you destroy the tape.

GG: I would not do that because it's a great-NO, WAIT! We need pictures, man!

B: Let me think about that for a minute, my friend.

TAPE CUTS

B: The police done ran my black ass outta California.

GG: I got run out too.

B: And here you are in Oregon. You got me on this tape here. Not that I'm afraid or anything. But it would be foolish for me to stick my head in the lion's mouth. But you can have some pictures, because *I don't give a fuck*.

GG: Neither do I, so let's get some goddamn fuckin pictures already! I'll cross out your eyes. Do I have your verbal, spoken permission?

B: Yeah, you do.

GG: Sir, would you mind getting a shot of me with this gentleman?

SIR: No, I don't mind.

BAR OWNER: No. NO. You can not have a camera in here.

GG: Because of the girls?

BAR OWNER: That's right. Because of the girls.

GG: I didn't take any yet.

BAR OWNER: I'll get one for you.

TAPE CUTS

B: So what I'm gonna do-since *you* say you just arrived here? I'm gonna show you a few things that you can do to come up with some *cheese*.

GG: Well, I need some cheese.

B: Yeah. Then you can get your ass a job, and then you could be my rich friend. But I would rather not see you scufflin *out here*.

GG: I'd rather not be scuffling. I'd get fucked up, I aint street smart enough.

B: I don't want to see you be doin it. Because I want to be able to show you how to manipulate and stack away your money. Without drugs.

GG: I don't do drugs.

B: No. Without doin'em, dealin'em, or bein around'em. It's all about what you tell the muthafucka, and it's all about how you present yourself.

GG: What's your last name?

B: Dell----.

GG: That's funny, because my mother has the same four first letters.

B: Well, maybe you my brother, with the other father.

GG: That could be. My long lost brother.

B: I bet your father has money, doesn't he?

GG: No, as a matter of fact, he doesn't.

B: What's he do?

GG: My dad's a janitor. He works hard.

B: I'm gonna save my last comment.

GG: No, let's hear it.

B: No I ain't gonna say it.

GG: Ya think that girl over there would let me buy her a drink?

B: No, hold back, I wanna say something. See that muthafucka over there? The old dude in them shitty clothes? That's a fine white bitch he got there. What do these women see in these old men without money?

GG: Weariness. Tired old guys, right? Some women love old guys. Their heart goes out to those guys, just like men pick up stray dogs. But I don't know, that's

probably full of shit. I don't even like dogs. If the guy's broke and he's old, the woman can have him on his hands and knees every day, begging her not to leave. Women like that.

B: Well, here's one thing women don't seem to understand, when their man tell'em, when they look in the mirror, that the only thing that they can see is their ass. They always lookin at they ass, to see if it round enough, firm enough, if it saggin, or whatever. They don't understand that...a marriage is made in the bed. You can tell me if you want, that, "Oh, I love her because she's so intelligent, and her brain." This bitch is ugly as a lizard. Look here partner. If the pussy ain't good, in the bed? It's a wrap.

GG: That's sad.

B: That ain't sad.

GG: Sure it is. It's reality. Reality is sad.

B: No, reality is sad to us because we don't get it.

GG: We're not evolved.

B: Maybe we ain't supposed to be. And you know what one part of that reality is? When one muthafucka can just wake up and see one day that there ain't no such thing as love. That poundin in the heart? That deep breathin? Them butterflies in your stomach? All that came from your stupidity. There's super-stupid, colossal stupid, and gigantic stupid. Me? I'm just stupid.

GG: I guess you're right. Why else would we be sitting in a bar at one in the afternoon?

B: What you want me to do? Try to go do some construction work somewhere? And feel like I am being responsible to myself, and the world, at eight dollars an hour? Shit, I'd rather be out here. Where everything is *soft*. Where everything is under my control.

GG: It sucks out here. It's cold out here. It's rainy, and it's lonely.

B: Well...there wasn't no cowboys that figured like that when they came to America. The scared stayed. The weak died on the way. And the strong made it. I *like* that shit. This is my life.

GG: A beautiful woman dances naked behind us. They are playing "Where Is My Mind" by the Pixies, on the sound system. As it fades out, so will we. Thank you Bobby.

B: You're welcome.

GG: The interview is over.



Many of this publication's readers - kindly masochists all - have written in to tell me how much they've enjoyed the previous column's take off on my friend Johnny Vallis. Rest assured, no one enjoyed it more than the Canadian singer/impressionist himself. In fact, he has strategically laid the last issue on his coffee table, open to the article in question, so visitors can't help but see his picture and read about him.

However, my quick-witted, publicity hungry pal did have one tine gripe to make: "How come you didn't mention John E. Vitalis - Undercover Record Collector?"

OK, here's the deal. Vallis, like many people in the music business, is a compulsive record collector. No matter what gig he takes on - corporate shows, nightclub engagements, or the occasional singing telegram assignment - he is always on the hunt for some great lost treasure from yesteryear.

I suspect that Vallis believes his efforts will someday make him a hero to archaeologists. It's a delusion common to all record collectors and one that I share. We all dream that one day historians will discover our record collection miraculously untouched and alphabetically arranged amid a pile of art-deco rubble. Looking it over with a mix of astonishment and delight the academics will bestow our life long obsessions with the ultimate posthumous validation as they cry out, "Now here was a man with taste!"

Maybe it will happen. Maybe not.

I tend to believe that people in the distant future will either completely dismiss our recordings because, "This Frank Sinatra guy is nowhere near as good at Pleekno Zebitz from the Quaasnorts Galaxy." Or because scientists will conclusively prove that music hastens the death process.

(If the latter is true, I'll be lucky to make it to the end



Harry Belafonte autographs an LP from Johnny Vallis's collection, increasing its value in the process.

of this sentence. Whew! Made it.)

In the meantime, this commercially-inspired disease provides the perfect opportunity to poke fun at the potential for callous behavior and personal cruelty of record collectors - and my friend Johnny Vallis - with the following radio play.

Dr. Iguana Theater Presents!

Undercover Record Collector

A Ken Burke Production

(Sustained dramatic brass note. Mixed under for opening declaration.)

Announcer

The story you are about hear is true.

Only the name has been changed to make it sound more like a hair tonic from my youth.

(Swinging jazz music up and under for narrator.)

Narrator

You've seen him on the streets, half in and half out of radio station dumpsters. Or maybe you caught a glimpse of him shuffling frantically through boxes at a garage sale. Perhaps you wondered about the man rifling through the donation bins at the local retirement home. You don't know his name. You don't know his game. You don't know what illuminates the darkest corners of his unquenchable soul. But be assured of this. Whether perusing flea markets in the Amazon, casing thrift shops in Antarctica, or sifting through ship wrecks on the ocean's floor, our hero remains in dogged pursuit of that seemingly unattainable cost-effective find. He's ready for adventure. He's ready for romance. He's ready to make a cheap deal. He's... (echo) John E. Vitalis - Undercover Record Collector!

(Music sting!)

Narrator

Tonight's Episode: The Funeral Singer.

(Funeral setting. John E. Vitalis is singing an odd mix of tunes.)

Vitalis

Here's a medley of the deceased's favorite tunes, sung just the way I know he would have liked 'em. "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's..." "Purple Haze flying in my brain..." "Fly me to the moon, let me play among the stars..." "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is..." "We had joy, we had fun we had seasons in the sun..." "The sun isn't yellow it's chicken..." "Ave Maria...." "Wild Thing! You make my heart sing..." "They say that cat Shaft is a bad muthuh - (shut your mouth) - I'm just talking about Shaft (well, he can dig it)..." "Love, this is my song, my serenade to you..." "I'm just a Human Fly and I don't know why, I've got 96 tears in 96 eyes..." "Oh Canada...."

Bereaved Widow

Oh, Mr. Vitalis that was uh...remarkable.

Vitalis

Thanks, I owe it all to my exhaustive record collection.

Bereaved Widow

It was so nice of you to show up and sing for us, especially since your name wasn't on the guest list. How well did you know Marvin?

Vitalis

Well enough to know that he'd want me to ask what . you're going to do with his record collection now that he's gone.

Bereaved Widow

Oh...h-h-his records. That seems so unimportant right now. I suppose I'll either give them to our neighbor's kids or sell them at our next garage sale. I don't know if I could even stand to look at them, they'd remind me of...M-M-M-Marvin. (Sobs uncontrollably.)

Vitalis

Now now, don't cry. I'll tell you what I'll do. Those are old records. Chances are he's played them and everything, so they've probably lost all their value to collectors. So, I'll give you 10 cents a piece for everything he's got and I'll move the stuff personally so you don't have to.

Bereaved Widow

10 cents? That doesn't seem like very much.

Vitalis

Well, nobody listens to those old vinyl records anymore. Everything is CD and downloads now.

Bereaved Widow

I guess you're right - but 10 cents?

Vitalis

I'll tell you what. I'll give you 25 cents a piece for everything, but that's as high as I can go. That's two and a half times higher than I was really prepared to pay.

Bereaved Widow

(Sniffs back tears.) OK. I guess hat sounds fairer.

Vitalis

Atta girl. Boy, Melvin would have been really proud of the way you negotiated the price so far up. You've got a great head for business.

Bereaved Widow

Th-thank you...and his name was M-M-M-Marvin. (Cries.)

Vitalis

Whatever...let's get those records.

Announcer

We'll be back with scenes from next week's episode after a word from Long Playing CoaguGel. The only vinyl cleaner made from human blood

(Record playing a familiar tune and skipping.)

Recording

"I'm forever blowing (skip). I'm forever blowing (skip) I'm forever blowing (skip). I'm forever blowing (skip)."

(Frustrated listener rips the needle noisily off the record.)

Woman

Oh Hal, I'm tired of our wonderful vinyl records being destroyed by everyday wear and tear. If only there was someway to fix them.

Hal

Why dear, haven't you heard of Long Playing CoaguGel?

Woman

CoaguGel? What's that?

Hal

Why it's the new miracle vinyl cleaner that makes your old recordings sound like new again. Here. Let me show you how it works. First you take patented applicator, apply a little CoaguGel to your chipped and damaged recording. Let it dry and voila! It's fixed.

Woman

Wow! Let me hear my record now!

Hal

Sure thing.

Recording

"I'm forever blowing ballgames..."

Woman

Oh, I love Ring Lardner, and the sound is so clear.

Hal

That's because CoaguGel is the only vinyl cleaner that uses human blood.

Woman

Human Blood?

Hal

That's right. Just puncture your skin, bleed a little into this bottle, mix in these chemicals and you have a fresh batch of CoaguGel.

Woman

But I have thousands of damaged old records.

Hal

Well then, you'd better get a needle and start poking holes in your skin, hadn't you? Ha-ha-ha-ha!

Woman

Ha-ha-ha! I guess so. Well, here goes. Ow! Look at all the blood. My records are going to sound great thanks to Long Playing CoaguGel!

(Woman continues to poke herself and yelp "OW!" underneath the announcer's tag line.)

Announcer

Long Playing CoaguGel is available at drugstores and electronics shop nationwide. Pick up some today and start enjoying music again.

(Music up and under for final comment from woman who is still stabbing herself.)

Woman

Ow! This recording hasn't sounded this good in years. Ow! Hal? Hal? I'm feeling a bit dizzy....

Narrator.

Tune in next week when John E. Vitalis takes his life in his hands and goes door-to-door as The Telegram Singer.

(Knocks on door. Man opens door. Vintage jazz is playing in the background.)

Vitalis

Mr. Norman?

Norman

Yes, that's me.

Vitalis

I have a telegram that needs to be sung to you. (Blows pitch-pipe begins singing in a swing Frank Sinatra style.) "Hey Mr. Grumpy, get out of bed. Spread love and kindness, because your mother is dead!"

Norman

Oh my god! My mother is dead?

Vitalis

That's what it says here.

Norman

(Begins crying uncontrollably.) Oh no, no, no. no....

Vitalis

Say, is that an original Bix Beiderbeck 78 playing in the background? I don't suppose you'd want your records to be associated with the awful news about your mother's death, would you?

Norman

You callous son-of-a-bitch!

(Begins strangling John E. Vitalis.)

Vitalis

Ga-a-a-ack. Ga-a-a-ack! Sputter, sputter.

(Choking and fighting sounds mixed under for final announcement.)

Narrator

That's next week on Johnny Vitalis - Undercover Record Collector!

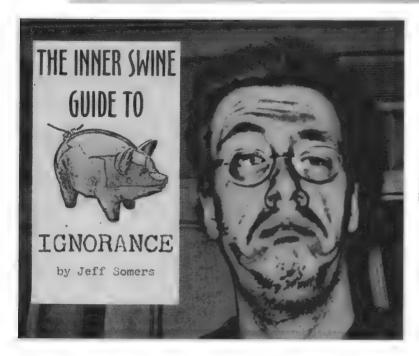
(Swinging jazz music up and out.)

My thanks to Johnny Vallis for allowing me to take his record collection in vain. You can see more about this top-flight entertainer at www.johnnyvallis.com.

You can drop me a line at driguana1@aol.com.



The obsessions begin. Young Johnny Vallis and his first true love - his Frankie Laine collection.



Episode Three: META-IGNORANCE



Just plug it into my veins!

The other day I was sitting in Hudson Bar and Books in New York City drinking single malt Scotch and reading, when I had an attack of Meta-Ignorance.

Hudson Bar and

Books is one of the world's greatest bars for whiskey. It isn't a boisterous place where you can order pints of beer and watch baseball games-I have plenty of other places for that—but rather a jazzy, quiet place with a chatty bartender, the most fantastic cheese plate I've ever had, and an seemingly endless supply of good booze. It's the only place so far I've ordered Glenmorangie Madeira Wood and not been laughed at, beaten up, or derisively offered a Dewars. Of course, my visits to Hudson Bar and Books are not without angst-inspiring moments; there is a sign posted in the front window that reads, ominously, PROPER ATTIRE REQUIRED, and

there has not been one time yet that I haven't paused with one hand on the doorknob, staring blankly at this sign, wondering if I was properly attired. So far I have established that proper attire requires pants of some sort, but beyond that it all remains mysterious.

At any rate, I was sitting there recently pretending to read a big, thick book and scheming to hit the bartender over the head, exchange clothes with him, and do his job for the rest of the afternoon-meaning I would lean rakishly behind the bar, drinking directly from a bottle of Scotch, and implore anyone who wandered in to tell me their troubles, inbetween humming tunelessly



I guess this means pants are required. I am once again shamed by society.

and checking my facial expression for appropriate levels

of rakish charm in the mirror—and waiting for my lovely wife, The Duchess. When she arrived, she asked me what I was drinking.

ME: Scotch. .

TD: Is that whiskey?

ME: Yes.

TD: Is bourbon whiskey?

ME: Yes.

TD: What's the difference? **ME:** ...look! An elephant!

META-IGNORANCE

The problem is not so much that I am ignorant, but that I am ignorant even of what I am ignorant of. I simply don't even know what I don't know. The above exchange is a classic example: While I know what whiskey is, and even have a vague idea of how to produce it, I can't tell you much about why some is bourbon and some is not. Well, I mean, I can now, because I did some research. You'd think that over the years I've ingested enough of both kinds of booze that my underbrain could genetically analyze each and I'd sort of instinctively know the answer, but as with most situations where you'd think my underbrain would provide some sort of guidance, all I get is static and the occasional urge to take a nice long, hot bath. This leaves me defenseless against attacks of Meta-Ignorance.

'Sometimes Meta-Ignorance rears its terrible horned head in situations where I really have no excuse—situations where I suddenly realize I am ignorant about things you might consider knowledge essential to my very survival. I'm not talking about the time The Duchess and I ended up hiking in the White Mountains of Vermont and were almost eaten by bears because I realized I was ignorant of things like which way is north and when lost in the woods what the hell do you do?

No thanks to you—or The Duchess—I now know the answer to the latter question is do not let your wife abandon you to be eaten by bears no matter how hard she tries.²

But I digress—I was discussing moments of Meta-Ignorance involving basic knowledge you'd think everyone who manages to not be killed during their everyday lives must know, like what in hell a ground wire is. The Duchess and I recently bought our first house, and being a) concerned for my masculine image and b) one of the cheapest bastards you'll ever meet, I naturally insist on doing all sorts of work around the house by myself, including wiring up light fixtures. Now, wiring up a light fixture does not require an advanced degree or even above-average intelligence, but I still managed to put my life and property at risk because when I opened the box and started the installation process, I had no *idea* what the extra exposed wire was for. Meta-Ignorance had reared its head: I didn't even know what I didn't know about electrical systems. How I didn't electrocute myself and burn down the house remains a mystery, because I did some creative things with that wire before discovering the truth.³

On a less immediately-threatening note, there is my Meta-Ignorance about my sad physical decline. Sure, I know that every year after you're approximately 25 is just a steady boogie-board ride down the mountain to my eventual death, but the specifics of my bodily functions remain elusive and the only time I learn anything about them is when they go haywire. This kind of Meta-Ignorance can easily kill you, of course:

ME: Hmmmn, I have a painful welt on my ankle.

TD: Want to go to the emergency room?4

ME: Nah, it doesn't look too bad.

<TIME PASSES>

ME: It seems my painful welt has eaten my entire foot and I am left with a bloody stump. Oh, feel woozy.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF META-IGNORANCE

The real problem with Meta-Ignorance is that it's impossible to combat, because you don't know what you're ignorant of. Ignorance can be cured—all it takes is some research and perhaps a bit of experimentation, possibly a willingness to take risks,⁵ which I can usually attain by drinking a few alcoholic beverages in a short amount of time. But if you don't even know what you don't know, you're screwed. Think about it: You might be doing something right now that is going to speed you on to your death, and you don't even know it. Like reading this article. Decades from now stern actors may

i My wife long ago ordered me to never use her name in my writing, so she is now known only as The Duchess. If you know what's good for you, you will refer to her only as The Duchess as well, even if you meet her in person

² See The Inner Swine, Volume 10 Issue 1, "Don't Be Eaten by Bears: Your Humble Editor has an Adventure"

³ In fact, for all I know, I did electrocute myself and everything since then, including this essay, has been a delusion like An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge. Although that would mean you exist only in the dying twitches of my brain activity, you poor soul.

⁴ This if an imagined conversation, of course, in reality my wife's response would be: Suck it up, silky-boy, and go fetch me some cookies. And my response to her would be: Yes'm. And then my futile stab at rebellion would be drinking half a bottle of whiskey in the kitchen while fetching her cookies and passing out with my head in the dishwasher. Don't ask how my head gets in the dishwasher. You don't want to know.

For example, tasting a sample of what's in the mysterious 'lupperware discovered in the tear of your fridge that may or may not have been left there by the previous tenants

be appearing in PSAs warning against reading anything written by Jeff Somers, as his words are now proved to cause insanity and blindness and eventual death.

There's also the hovering specter of humiliation due to unsupposed ignorance. Above and beyond physical harm and death, all men fear public humiliation, which is why we are all so willing to feign knowledge and fake our way through things rather than admit we don't know something. Sometimes I am convinced that all men are as ignorant as I am, and we're all just nodding wisely and repeating phrases we don't understand in order to appear wise. Take, for example, escrow. What in hell is escrow? No one knows. But if you bring it up in the company of men, all of them will nod wisely and say something like, "Ah, yes, escrow: Can't do without the ole' escrow account." Much in the same way I once looked my mechanic in the eye and said, "Ah, yes, the solenoid. Can't get far without one of those!"6 But I know I'm ignorant about cars and engines and, well, physics. So whenever the conversation drifts to that subject, I start being cagey with my words—a lot of thoughtful nodding, as if I'm considering my options, replaces most verbal communications in these sorts of situations—and

start building mental ditchworks to retreat behind if I get caught out. But what about subjects I think I'm fluent in? For example, my own family: I've started to realize I know next to nothing about my family, and anything I think I know that dates from before, oh, about when I was twelve years old is almost certainly bullshit I made up once long ago and have repeated to myself so often it seems true. Only to be revealed as bullshit the moment I relate it, authoritatively, to someone.⁷

Of course, one of the things I may very well be Meta-Ignorant of is how obvious it is to everyone but me that I am ignorant. I like to imagine that with my eyeglasses, my hipster-gone-to-alcoholic-seed fashion sense, and constant clutching of tomes to my concave chest I appear somewhat erudite to people who don't know me very well, but the truth is strangers on the street are probably moved to pity at the sight of me, and experience the sudden urge to take me by the arm and guide me across the street. If you see me wandering the street pretending to be non-ignorant, however, I'd advise you to resist that urge; if it's before noon I am hungover and prone to bouts of sudden-onset retching, and if it's after noon I am inebriated and prone to violence.

- 6 His look of frank pity remains clear in my nightmares.
- 1 Like the fact that I thought my Mother was Lutheran, and told my wife so many times, only to have my outraged Mother correct me at a birthday gathering. The Duchess will not let me forget it.

Cupid and Psyche By Corrine De Winter Psyche dumbstruck By her dream of love, Sprawled like an angel With a broken wing, Pale and murmuring in her sleep. She bites her lip To bleed desire. With a sigh, Cupid comes spying The shadows burned into her skin, Hears the faint Save Me. Uttered to no one. From the edge of the divan He draws back the silver arrow And lets it fly Into the bullseye of her heart.

Unknown

By Ken Burke

Photos taken from www.unknownhinson.com

HISON

The Hard Rockin', Country Singin', Crazy Talkin' Voice of a Squid!

Part late-night horror-movie host, part novelty act with a death row attitude, Unknown Hinson appears to be the living embodiment of the 1966 B-movie *Dracula Meets Billy The Kid*. The most unique performer of our time, the multi-talented Hinson is an edgy, funny

singer-songwriter, not to mention a top-flight guitarist equally at home playing traditional acoustic country and hard-assed rock. Moreover, he draws a decidedly unusual audience rockabillies, honky tonkers, goths, barely reformed juvenile delinquents, and classic guitar rockers. All of whom comprise the target audience for Squidbillies - a surreal staple of the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim line-up - where Hinson provides the voice of the ultra-redneck violent cartoon squid Early Cuyler.

Best described as a country & western performance artist, Hinson

employs the same type of inspired role-playing Andy Kaufman indulged in when he took on the Tony Clifton character. However, whereas Clifton was designed to be an aggressive no talent boor (which is why the bit was funny), Hinson's character is a crowd-pleaser with a gift for deliberately provocative compone patter. Indeed, his working vocabulary is larded with pure backwoods pronunciations such as "womerns" for "women," "rawk" for "rock," and "rakkerds" for "records." Further, he

punctuates his gab with little self-encouraging asides of "yeh-yeh," and refers to anything having to do with him or his music as "chart-toppin"."

Although he makes many claims that can't easily be proved or disproved, Hinson's true identity isn't too hard to discover. Two clippings in his press kit and

one article link from his official website mention that he is the alter-ego of a Charlotte-area music teacher and studio musician named Danny Baker. Further, his Capitol CD's songwriter credit reads: "All songs written by Unknown Hinson (sdb Music, SESAC/Pacific Winds Music, SESAC)." A trip to the SESAC website quickly reveals that all the songs listed were written by one Stuart Daniel Baker. Moreover, his remarkable voiceover work on Squidbillies is credited to Stuart Daniel Baker.

Regardless, Hinson won't admit that he and Danny Baker are the same person. Why should he? Besides, it's much more fun to

hear his version of the chart-toppin' truth, much of which sounds like something drawn from an early Harlan Ellison novel. Indeed, the Unknown Hinson mythos includes allegations that he gained a following singing country music as a carnival sideshow attraction until a 30-year jail sentence waylaid his career.

This writer could find no evidence of a jail record

for either Hinson or Danny Baker. Suffice it to say the character of Unknown Hinson was probably created in 1993, the year the singer-songwriter claims to have left incarceration. The jail sentence scenario provides a wonderful explanation for why most of the performer's attitudes and references are stuck in a 1960's time warp. He writes about "hippies," still rails against "womern's lib," and disdainfully covers Jimi Hendrix and "the Led Zeppelins."

Donning an embroidered Western gambler's outfit, exaggerated eyebrows, sideburns, and fangs. Hinson first burst into prominence via a cable access show aired in Charlotte, North Carolina called the *The Wild. Wild*

South Show. Creating an indelible image as a "hillbilly vampire," he quickly followed with his own regular cable access program of comedic vignettes, all while working the local club scene. Recordings for the independent Uniphone label eventually led to a 2002 EP for Capitol titled Rock'n'Roll Is Straight From Hell, which resulted in tours with the likes of Rev. Horton Heat and Hank Williams III. On stage, he is just as likely to chew out an audience member as play a blistering hard-rocker or demented country ballad.

As a result, his first full major label album, The Future Is Unknown, a

triumph of character-based satire, was a major challenge for the mainstream Capitol label to promote. Not that Hinson lacks talent. In both conception and execution he proves to be a supremely gifted craftsman. His best songs simultaneously threaten and tickle the listener ala the heavy-breathing stalker in "Foggy Windows," the romancer of rubber sex dolls in "Polly Urethane," the recalcitrant adulterer of "I Ain't Afraid of Your Husband," and the sex-changed divorcee addressed in "Man To Man." It's funny stuff, indeed. It's just that country music, even with its massive influx of Northern middle-class female listeners, just can't reconcile the irony of his politically incorrect character with his unique devotion to a rather scary character.

Despite decent sales, Hinson didn't last long at Capitol. His current album on Coffin Case records - makers of some delightfully ghoulish guitar cases that look like miniature coffins - is equally fine. *Target Practice* relies more heavily on the troubadour's shockingly fine hard rock guitar chops while his outre' lyrics writhe with satiric bile.

When we spoke, Hinson, who counts Matt Groening,

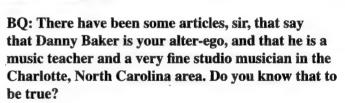
Tom Petty, Billy Bob Thornton and Tim Robbins among his fans, didn't seem worried about his act being a tough sell. Calling from an unspecified location, the bottomfanged felon proved utterly charismatic, funny, and yes a bit scary, as he responded to my oh-so-polite questions.

Brutarian Quarterly: In the CD jacket all your songs are listed as being written by Unknown Hinson at SDB Music for Sesac. Well, Sesac's website lists Stuart Daniel Baker as the author.

Unknown Hinson: No, Unknown Hinson wrote 'em. That's my name.

BQ: Do you know Danny Baker?

UH: No. I take that back. I met him.
When I got out of the joint - I'll come
back to this later about my stint in prison.
But after I got out, as part of my duties
- community service - I went around and
entertained people at various rest homes
and certain institutions. I met his'n and
he was a patient - I won't name the exact
hospital but it was a hospital somewhere
in North Carolina - and he got a little bit
too overzealous when he heard my music
and he kindly got obsessed with me. He's
been stalking me ever since. I can't help
the boy. He's got a problem. He needs to
get his life together.



UH: I don't know a lot about him other than he does show up on my doorstep from time to time. I had to call the law...you know.

BQ: Do you treat him with any kindness or do you try to get him away from you as soon as possible? UH: Well, man, all I do is - when I'm home, which ain't very often, he comes to the door. I'll greet him and say, "Hey, Hoss, you need to think about it. You need to get yourself together and be somebody and quit trying to live vicariously through me - The King of Country Western Troubadours."

BQ: How does he respond to that?

UH: He'll hang around and then he'll leave. He ain't never become violent or nothin' like that. He knows what would happen if he does. Yeh-yeh, I ain't scared of

him. Don't make no mistake about that. I ain't a-scared of him.

BQ: So, you're a dangerous person in your own right?

UH: No, no - I wouldn't say that. I'm a man of *love*! Yeh-yeh. Everything I write about, Ken is about real life experiences that I have experienced in my life. Or, at least situations that I have witnessed with my chart-toppin' eyes. I write about it and put it in country-western music form. It's all real life experiences about the nuclear family unit and the Heartland of the U.S.A.

BQ: We'll work up to talking about many of the songs on your album, but first tell us a little something about yourself. How old of an individual are you, sir?

UH: How old? Well, how old do I look to you?

BQ: Well, you look about 35 to me.

UH: That'll work.

BQ: Are you from North Carolina?

UH: I'm from what they call the foothills - halfway in between the mountains and the beach in the fine state of North Carolina.

BQ: Your press kit says that "Unknown" is actually your first name and that you got it from your dad.

UH: Yeah. You know, people gets that wrong. They call me "The" Unknown Hinson. My first name ain't "The," Ken. It's Unknown. Hinson - yeh-yeh- Unknown Hinson.

BQ: Let's talk a bit about your image. To the uninitiated, you would appear to look like a vampire. Would that be a correct assessment?

UH: You know, I was hoping you wouldn't mention that. I get that all the time. That was something that was started by - pardon the expression - the evil, wicked press. Which I ain't associating you with - don't get me wrong. Yeh-yeh. They call me that. Youngerns who sees me, these young folks who listens to the rawk music - that gothic mess - they think I'm dark. They say, "Oh dude, you dark. You've got the black hair and the black show day clothes, you've got a chauffeur dressed in black and he drives you around in your black Cadillac.

You must be a vampire." No, nom that don't work. Because a vampire's fangs is on the top rack, right? That's it. And my fangs or my teeths, if they way fangs, they're on the bottom. So, the physics of me biting somebody on the neck is pert near impossible unless I stood on my head. That throws the vampire theory right out of the window.

BQ: I know that you're King of the Country Western Troubadours, but please tell us how your look evolved.

UH: Yeh. Number one: I'm in a class all my own. You pretty much gathered that when you put my record on and first seen my picture, right? Yeh-yeh. I don't wear no cowboy hat, no no. I ain't like the steroid-eatin' pretty boys who wears them black cowboy hats and tight

designer jeans, and ain't playing nothin', just tushy-pushin' around the stage with a McDonald's microphone in front of them. That ain't me, Hoss. I play the guitar and sing country & western chart-toppers to the folks. The reason I don't wear a cowboy hat is - I ain't bald! They all bald. I got a full head of chart-toppin' jet black hair that drives the womerns wild! That's right. If you had hair like mine, you wouldn't want to show it to the womerns?

BQ: Absolutely. I also admire your sideburns.

UH: Yeh-yeh, they a gift.

BQ: Why did you decide to get into country music as we call it?

UH: Well, when I was a youngern, my momma picked guitar and sang for me when I was in the crib. I remember that.

BQ: What type of songs did she sing to you?

UH: Mainly old western folk songs. Yeh-yeh. When I got to be about five, she said, "Look here, you wanna play the guitar?" I said, "Yeah, momma. I want to play." She showed me one chord and then handed the guitar to me and said, "Look here, Unknown, if you want to do this, you'll figure it out yourself." That's all she showed me was that one chord. I think it was a G-chord. The rest is history. She know'd that if I wanted to do it in my heart, she wouldn't have to beg me.

BQ: When did you first start playing with the idea to make country music your living?

UH: When I growed up, my momma sung country and western music.

BQ: Professionally?

UH: No, no, I reckon the sound of her voice, the way she sang those songs to me it endeared me to the genre as they say. That was my quest in life. It still is, to be a chart-topping country-western troubadour. I think that country music has done got off the path, yeh-yeh. It needs to be steered back between the ditches and the Unknown Hinson phenomenon is happening right now as we speak, Ken.

BQ: You know, there's not enough outhouse in today's country music experience and that's why you're so different.

UH: Well, people say, "Unknown, we appreciate you because you're bringing it back. You ain't like all this formula pretty boy mess that the rakkerd labels turn out by the mass." Every week there's a brand new pretty boy in tight jeans, all pumped up on his Nordic-Track, in a black cowboy hat.

BQ: Your press kit mentions that you worked in a carnival working with snakes and biting the heads off certain domestic fowl.

UH: I done it.

BQ: I don't want to use this word incorrectly, but were you what is known as a carnival geek?

UH: (Accent drops slightly) That's a little strong, Ken. For the sake of your magazine, we won't get real graphic. They's a new trend where we got to watch what we say. I will say that I left home when I was 14-years-old and I hooked up with a six truck carny that run around the deep south working country fairs, yeh-yeh. It was my job, I worked there in the midway at a 10-in-1 show. To the laymen, they would call that a sideshow and I did work with various wildlife including snakes and chickens and a few others.

BQ: Did you mesmerize these animals to keep them from attacking you?

UH: Well, I've always been an animal lover, yeh-yeh. I never got hurt, never got hurt. Can't say the same for some of the animals. It was purely unintentional if they did. Anyway, the evolution of the chart-topping hits started right there on the midway. The owner of the carnival, he let me sing a few of my chart-topping songs that I had wrote, to the audiences. In a matter of weeks, the gate receipts for the fair was up because they was coming to see me. At the time I was billed as:

Troubadour Boy. Yeh-yeh. In betweenst working with the animals, I would sing to the crowd three or four country-western songs that I had wrote myself.

BQ: Tell me what era this was during American history.

UH: We'll just say that it's before 1960, yeh-yeh. Them Beatles hadn't come out so it was the early '60's, maybe '61, '62, right in there.

BQ: And you were singing pure country music, the Unknown Hinson way?

UH: That's it - right from my chart-topping heart. I was offered a rakkerd contract back then, right there. One night a fella from a rakkerd label come up. They seen my act and he wanted to sign me right there.

BQ: What label was that, sir?

UH: I can't mention it right now because it is what they call a subsidiary of somebody else. Yeh-yeh. One of them big conglomerates - one of them big raider companies that buys up everything. Anyhow, they was some boys in the audience. The history books refer to them as the "pioneers of country western music." What they was jealous cowboy hat wearing mens who seen my act and was kicking themselves for not doing it first. So, what the done was they conspired to have me setup, framed, and put away. So, they had me arrested and they's too many charges to remember.

BO: What was the worst of those charges?

UH: Well, let's just the ultimate crime - murder one. You might not want to print that. Yeh-yeh-yeh.I think that sounds more poetic, don't you? It's more gripping. But they had me set-up. I went to trial. I was charged, convicted, and sentenced to 20 years. There weren't nothing I could do, you know, I was done. Career was over with. So I was mad. Any man who gets slapped with 20 years, they're gonna get mad, right? So, there in the courtroom, I jumped up and screamed at the judge, "Look here judge, when I get out I just might find you and whup your butt! How about that?" So he banged his hammer and said, "Aw right, this is what happened, another 10 years for communicating a threat." Which 20 and 10, that makes 30. What man wouldn't try and defend hisself by raising his voice?

BQ: Which prison did you serve your time in, sir? UH: Well, I can't get real specific with the details. Let's just say that it was in the great state of Illinois.

BQ: Did you get any time off for good behavior?

UH: No. I done a lot of solitary.

BQ: Did you get a chance to formulate more of your musical ideas in prison?

UH: I wrote, for sure. I wrote hundreds of charttopping hits. One of 'em is on this new record right now that goes back to them days. "I Ain't Afraid of Your Husband" was wrote in the joint.

BQ: That's a wonderful song. It's got that true country feel.

UH: Womerns likes a man to display his courage, right?

BQ: You have a strong feel for married women in your songs. Is that intentional or just the way it works out?

UH: Womerns makes the rakkerd business work. They's the ones who buys the rakkerds. Mans don't appreciate the arts like a womern. My job, as King of Country Western Troubadours, is to hip the womerns to the sitch. It's like the song "Your Man," I'm trying to hip the womern to the sitch that maybe her man is maybe, you know...(cough). It ain't a put-down. I'm just saying, "Hey darlin', look here. Here's what happenin'." I'm trying to do the womern a favor. Could happen to anybody.

BQ: I find the song "Your Man is Gay" to be incredibly funny but in a way it's also kind of sweet. It seems you're identifying with her problem and trying to offer a possible solution.

UH: Like I said, I don't want to see her made a monkey of.

BQ: So, harkening back to something you said earlier, are songs like that based on true experiences?

UH: Yeh-yeh. Hey Ken, the Unknown Hinson phenomenon is happening right now because inside my head, my brain, there's a bottomless pit of creative wealth oozing with country-western thought matter. That's it. I'm a troubadour, Hoss.

BQ: Did anything happen in prison that inspired you even further to become a country troubadour?

UH: Well, the thing that drove me the whole time was the fact that I was wrongfully incarcerated, number one. My whole entire country-western career was stoled from me. They stole thirty years of my life and all the possibilities of a brilliant career was took right from me. So, any man is going to have vengeance in his mind. That's what motivated me, kept me going until the day I got out was the thought that, "When I got out, I'm going

to reclaim, yeh-yeh, my crown, my throne as the King of Country Western Troubadours and I'm going to get it all back." That's been my quest.

BQ: How long have you been out of jail?

UH: It'll be eleven years this August.

BQ: Do you remember the first public appearance you made after leaving prison?

UH: Like I said, I had to do nigh on a year of community service just to go through the motions. Because anytime they let a con out after that much time, they're going to keep an eye on him. They're going to make sure he don't slip up. So, I had to do a lot of charity stuff - hospitals, rest homes. I think the first show date was the week I got out. I played for a VFW dance one night and I recall a fight broke out and I near got in some trouble that night, but they was witnesses there that said I did not start the fight. So, I got off with that - but there weren't no trouble, nobody got hurt.

BQ: Was your demeanor and impact the same as it is now?

UH: Yeh-yeh: Or you might say the Hinson phenomena spans all demographics.

BQ: I think that's why the punk kids and the goth kids like you.

UH: Yeh-yeh, and the factory workers. Blue collar man, womerns, young punks that's infatuated with the extranatural. They's doctors, lawyers, engineers, nurses, all types. Unknown Hinson is like a color? Right? You might find a nuclear physicist that's likes the color red. You might find a doctor whose favorite color is red. You might find a factory worker, his favorite color happens to be red. It's like a color, it ain't bound by no age group, sex, nor gender, nor creed, no nothin'. Certain people get snagged on a certain color, red, blue, whatever it is - but they like it when they might not have a thing in common. They might not be nowhere near the same age as each other, see? That's what country-western music needs, Ken. A revolution. The Hinson phenomenon is happenin' raht now as we speak.

BQ: Let's step back and talk a bit about the roots of that phenomenon. Who are some of the country performers who inspired you?

UH: I think Faron Young is an equal. I think in no way did he receive the recognition or credit that he deserved. I'd have to say that he's my all-time favorite.

BQ: I think you are one kick-ass guitar player.

UH: Well, thank you. I consider that a compliment coming from Music City.

BQ: I know that you don't particularly like rock music, but you do it very well.

UH: I do it as a disclaimer. The reason I play occasional rawk in my show dates and concerts is just to show the youngerns that it don't take no talent to play that mess. Any idiot can make that racket. Country-Western, that takes talent. I play my hippie mess, I sing that hippie mess, and I sing four or five country-western ballads, then I go back and do another hippie mess song, just to show the youngerns, "Hey, they ain't nothin' to this mess."

BQ: Yet, despite the disclaimer, they enjoy it.

UH: They do. But somebody got to stand up and guide 'em, tell 'em what's wrong, and show 'em there ain't no value in it. Country-western music is on the rise thanks to Unknown Hinson. Them Beatles ain't making no new rawk rekkards. Them Led Zepplins ain't making no new rawk rekkards. How many times can you listen to that mess?

BQ: Some of your look would suggest that you came from the same era as Elvis Presley and I was wondering if you enjoyed rockabilly music.

UH: Yeh-yeh. I don't see no comparison with Elvis, all right?

BQ: Did any of the guitarists of that era, say Link Wray or Merle Travis, and from a later era Junior Brown, have an effect on you?

UH: Well, I'll put it like this: I done told you Faron's my favorite country-western singer - he's a fellow troubadour and I rate him as my equal. On the guitar, I'd have to say one of the biggest influences of my life was a fellow from overseas called Django Reinhart. Yeh-yeh.

BQ: So, when you're playing just for pleasure, you like that swing and jazz feel?

UH: Well, he put the fire in the guitar, yknow? That's what I try to do, Ken. If you don't put the fire in the guitar, it ain't going to get hot. You've got to have fire in your playing.

BQ: I hate to belabor the point, but are there any rock guitarists you admire? Because you do some hard grungey things that I really admire coming out of you.

UH: Well, I sure appreciate that. But don't forget that the only reason that I do it is to show folks that it don't take

no talent to do it.

BQ: I've also noticed in your songs "Venus Bound" and the "Unknown Hinson Theme," there is a little bit of what we call exotica.

UH: Well, when I was a boy, I liked robots. I collected robots until my family like fell apart. I always liked the science fiction movies, I think that might've influenced me to write that one about going to another world. I think I understand what you're saying is there's like a bachelor pad influence or cocktail music. I can see why you'd say that, but that's just where my head was at the time. My head's in a different place now and it will be tomorrow.

BQ: There seems to be a little bit of soul music and blues running through things like "Peace, Love, and Hard Liquor."

UH: Well, "Peace, Love, and Hard Liquor" is what it is. It's an anthem. It's an anti-drug song of sorts. I talk about drinkin'. Drinkin' is legal, drugs ain't. So, it's an anthem. Once again, I try to show young folks that there is danger ahead. What they need to do is, if they take a drink, use they head, and use good judgement when they drink. In my opinion, they're ain't no reason to buy that expensive mess, because the effect is the same with the cheap stuff. So, you gotta use your head when you drink.

BQ: I'm not sure the big label alcohol companies would want that known.

UH: It would their sales if I'm advertising certain brand names. To get Unknown Hinson to yell out the name of their liquor could help.

BQ: Do you have an endorsement deal with any liquor company at this time?

UH: No. They's a couple of 'em vying for me, but I ain't signed no papers yet.

BQ: Do you have any endorsement deals with any musical companies?

UH: Yeh-yeh, I do. The greatest guitar company in the world, Gibson guitars. Faron Young played Gibson. If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for Unknown Hinson.

BQ: Was there a particular moment when it all came together for you? A time when you said, "This is it. This is how I want to look, how I want to play, and the type of appeal I want to cultivate?"

UH: It started when I was a kid in the carnival, Ken. I look like I look. Some people have blonde hair, some

people have red hair. I got black hair. I was blessed with some striking facial hair as well. Piercing eyes, chart-toppin' teeths. Womern likes my movie star good looks. When I was down there in my snake pits, singing my chart-toppers for the first time, I seen the womerns go wild! Some of them fainted. I know'd right then, right there, that's what I wanted. Give me more. I was addicted. I ain't looked back since. Well...briefly for 30 years I was in the pen, but I'm out now. I ain't goin' back. I swear I ain't going back.

BQ: According to your press kit your first public impact came via a television show in the Charlotte area. What can you tell us about that?

UH: You know, I done my own television show, a cable access television show called *The Unknown Hinson Show* - aptly named - and it was a half hour weekly show. What it was, was various vignettes of the days in the life of Unknown Hinson.

BQ: Did you get a chance to sing?

UH: Oh yeah. In between the little vignettes we would have music videos. I'd get up and sing a chart topper. We'd have guests on the show, go on location, shoot some mess. It's an award-winning show. It received four awards.

BQ: Which awards were those, sir?

UH: Best Locally Produced Television Show of 1999, 2000, and I got Best Local Television Personality, yehyeh, in '94. And I got another award for Best Cable Access Show a year after it went off the air. But you can't buy those tapes nowhere.

BQ: Who gave you those awards?

UH: Local entertainment publications in the Charlotte area.

BQ: That show more or less broke you in with your local public?

UH: Yeah, and peoples was recording the shows off the television set and trading 'em around and saying, "Hey watch this and you'll see this." Some of 'em ended up out west. You never know whose got 'em. They's on a lot of tour busses, I know that.

BQ: You were playing clubs during this time? UH: Oh yeah.

BQ: Have you ever done anybody's songs other than your own?

UH: Only in the rawk disclaimer portion of my show

or concert. I have played a song by them Who, Jimi Hendrix, Paul Revere and the Raiders, I done one of them - that's an old number called "Steppin' Out." Yehyeh, it's about cheatin'.

BQ: Which anyone who likes country music could relate to?

UH: Yeh-yeh, of course I doctor up the words. I kindly take certain liberties with the words as they say. I do 'em up my own way to tell a chart-topping story.

BQ: Were you surprised when you started drawing all the goth rockers an psychobillies to your shows?

UH: Well, fans is fans. Every fan you got is very important. I've seen youngerns come up to me, buy my rakkerd, and want to shake my hand - they'd covered in tattoos, nose rings, got chains from their lips running to their ears. I think, "I hope maybe you have received a blessing from my music, Hoss." My main objective is that I hope my music does enrich people's lives and I would like to think that every time they hear an Unknown Hinson rakkerd or seen an Unknown Hinson show that it might help them change their life in a way. Maybe help save a marriage, help prevent a car accident, something like that. I think that's worthwhile, don't you?

BQ: Absolutely. Tell me a little bit about touring with some of these people like Rev. Horton Heat and Hank Williams III.

UH: Yeh-yeh, they's good boys.

BQ: Do they like what you do?

UH: Yeah, we all got along real good.

BQ: They're not intimidated by your talent or your stage presence?

UH: No, no. They's fellow troubadours - they the real deal. They good boys.

BQ: What do you think of what they do?

UH: I like 'em fine. Hank's a good boy. Me and him drunk a lot of liquor together, chased a lot of womerns. He's a good boy. And, Rev. Horton Heat? Fine fella, wonderful guitar player. The youngerns that you're talking about - the gothics, the greasers, they come around. The womerns look good. The mens, I can't say much for them, but the womerns look good. Some of them look like the Bettie Page type. They realize their femininity and they show it off. I like that. I like to see a womern dress up, don't you? You can go into any store in American and see womerns in sweatsuits, tennis shoes, no make-up, and hair all messed up. But when

you see a woman who's put on a dress, made her face up perty, fix her hair, put on some spiked heels and carry a pocket book - you know that's a womern! And she is in touch with her feminine side- which mans likes.

BQ: What about men who are in touch with their feminine sides. Do a lot of them turn up at your shows?

UH: No, no, no.

BQ: Besides great music and the undiluted personality of Unknown Hinson, what type of wild stuff can people expect to see at one of your shows?

UH: I do some gun tricks. Yeh-yeh. I carry a piece, it's .38. Like I said, womern likes mans that shoots guns and sings country western. It's a fact.

BQ: Why a .38? Why not a Magnum which is more popular in these times?

UH: Well, when you got a guitar strapped on and you reach for your piece and fire, the recoil is a little too much with a Magnum while you're playing a solo. Sometimes I'll play a solo with my left hand and fire my piece with my right. It' a recoil factor.

BQ: Being that you're an ex-convict with a gun, do club owners think twice before they stiff you at paycheck time?

UH: No and I don't get paid with no checks. You ever try to cash a check made out to "Unknown?"

BQ: Do you vote? Do you carry a driver's licence or any other form of identification?

UH: No. My rakkerd contract has my name on it, but I can't get no driver's licence because of my past. I can't vote because of my past.

BQ: Is there a time when you think you'll be given a pardon so you can enjoy some civil liberties?

UH: I'm free to roam, but they're going to keep their eye on me for the rest of my life, Ken.

BQ: Well, they'll know where to find you, they just have to follow the crowd, right?

UH: That's it! And I ain't done nothin'- they ain't got nothin' on me.

BQ: Is the album out on Capitol different than the one released by Uniphone in 2000?

UH: First, I'd like to say, the brand new release by Unknown Hinson - *The Future is Unknown* - on the Capitol label, they's a couple of songs that was on the

previously released indie release, but they's about 5 or 6 brand new songs on this one that no other Hinson rakkerd has ever had. So, I guess you could say it's the Capitol manifest of Unknown Hinson's chart-topping wrath. To the present anyhow.

BQ: How did someone with your image and your very country style - which is totally contrary to modern country music - get on a major label like Capitol?

UH: Yeh-yeh. They was the first rakkerd label to meet my demands. I was offered rakkerd deals.

BQ: What were you demands?

UH: Number one, at the time I really needed a brand new power brake booster for my Cadillac, and they got that fixed up immediately. And, the gave me some spending moneys. I was kindly scared to be on that label because of them Beatles. I thought, "Them Beatles - what would Faron Young think?" You know Faron, he was on that label.

BQ: So was Buck Owens, Hank Thompson, and a lot of great people.

UH: That's right. Merle Haggard too - all fellow troubadours. That's what cinched it for me. But I was worried about them Beatles and them Beach Boys, but they had had enough Faron to cinch it for me. I figured, "They need some help - they lost their ass on them Beatles and Beach Boys, maybe I can help 'em out and sell some rakkerds."

BQ: There is a story in your press kit that is intimated but not exactly spelled out. During contract negotiations, did you at some point pull out your .38?

UH: Yeah. I'll just generalize and say yes. But it was not a hostile act. It was something I do, Ken when I'm sittin' in the radio station, or sittin' in the back seat of my car. Some people, when they get stressed out or they're concentrating, they'll squeeze on a little tennis ball or something to relieve stress. I like to squeeze on the trigger of my .38. That's a stress reliever for me.

BQ: And a stress inducer for others I might imagine.

UH: Well, I ain't never pulled a trigger on nobody. I never have dome that.

BQ: How do you feel about the concept of gun control?

UH: Guns is a part of our American Heritage.

BQ: Do you think everybody ought to carry one just

to even things up?

UH: No I don't. I don't carry a gun because I'm out here trying to threaten nobody. I carry a gun because I like the feel of a pistol. It helps me concentrate. It relieves stress - it works for me.

BQ: Have you ever relieved stress in this manner inside a club?

UH: Oh yeah - on stage.

BQ: Are there blanks or real bullets in the gun when you do that?

UH: They's loud. The gun is loud.

BQ: What is the craziest thing you've done on stage that you laugh about today?

UH: I used to do a ventriloquist act. (The author laughs.) No, I'm serious. I've got a ventriloquist dummy that was built in the image of me. His name was Little Bit Hinson - he got chart-topping hair, sideburns, teeth, show day clothes just like me. He's got a gun in his hand too. We done a ventriloquist act and little skits. But some of the dope-taking hippie types that was taking them psycho drugs and hallucinigizing got right scared of Little Bit Hinson. "Freaked out" is what they call it. So I kind of nixed the ventriloquist act for a while.

BQ: Do you ever inspire harsh criticism from members of your audience?

UH: Like I said, I'm every womerns dream and every jealous husband's nightmare. It don't matter where I go, Ken, them jealous husband's are going to be there.

BQ: Tell me about your song, "I Make Faces When I Make Love."

UH: Well, I do.

BQ: (Laughs.) How do you know?

UH: Well man, I'm aware of what my face is doing.

BQ: There's really something sweet about "Polly Urethane," the rubber sex doll ballad. Which you sing with a lot of feeling. Do you think you could ever sing like that to a living breathing women?

UH: I do all the time. I'm a man of love and I appreciate beauty. All beauty. It's all love, whether it be a beautiful, well-endowed buxom womern or a brand new black shiny new Cadillac car. There's still beauty in everything.

BQ: Do some women get angry with you for singing songs like "Pregnant Again," where you basically sing

that you don't believe the child is yours?

UH: Yeh that's happened to most mans. It's happened to me several times and I won't get into it that much. I'll back up on something I said earlier. That's one of the very few songs that I sing to the mans in the audience. Because they's a lot of fellers who might've found themselves in a similar dilemma to that - paying for the womerns mistakes. Yeh-yeh. The good womerns will realize that it is their fault. I mean, I'm a firm believe in the safe sex. I ain't ashamed to suit up before I make love. That don't bother me none. You might not want to print that.

BQ: Is there still a lot of opportunity on the road for that type of behavior?

UH: Oh yes, they's womerns everywhere. Betweenst the party liquor and the womerns, the Unknown Hinson show date tours is unbelievable son. You got to see it to believe it.

BQ: How is the album doing saleswise?

UH: As far as I can tell, it's doing real good. Yeh-yeh.

BQ: Has there ever been anybody from a way of life so strange that you couldn't understand why they'd like your music?

UH: They's some actors out in Hollywood that I wouldn't have figured to be Unknown Hinson fans. I'm glad they are, don't get me wrong. Every fan is valuable to me.

BQ: Billy Bob Thornton likes your stuff.

UH: Yeah he does. Tim Robbins, I was on a show with him out at Sundance.

BQ: How did you end up at Sundance, did you have a film entered there?

UH: No, they just wanted me to play. [Thornton] said that he was a fan and would like for me to play the show, so I done it. It was cold out there.

BQ: How did it go over?

UH: Real good, real good. Standing room only.

BQ: Are any radio stations playing your stuff?

UH: I think they are, because I've been doing a lot of radio interviews in the morning. I do two or three hours of radio in the morning, obviously phoned in.

BQ: What type of stations are you getting - college? Alternative?

UH: I get a little bit of all of 'em. They's rawk, classic

rawk - the ones that plays the Led Zepplins and Aerosmiths, and I also get what they call the mainstream country, which in my opinion is just rehashed rawk. Real country western, that's my quest in life, Hoss.

BQ: Have you had a chance to hear some of your records being played on the air?

UH: Every now and then I hear one, yeah.

BQ: What was it like the first time your heard one of your records being played?

UH: Well, I'd have to say it was about time!

BQ: (Laughs.) How are you planning on promoting this LP. Do you have a lot of big TV shots coming up or are you better served by the media in an underground sense?

UH: Well, one on one is the best. You can't beat live performance. It's a marriage between the performer and the fans and that's what makes it go 'round. But yeah, they is various TV show appearances in the works. Until something is confirmed, I can't really say.

BQ: Have you received any offers for movies?

UH: I have, but I ain't took one because I'm holding out for them to make the Unknown Hinson Story. Yeh-yeh.

BQ: I saw something on LikeTelevision.Com - the "Venus Bound" video. Will you be doing more videos?

UH: Probably, yeah. Still, the best way to witness the Unknown Hinson phenomenon is in person.

BQ: One year from now, how far will the phenomenon shave spread?

UH: Well, a year from now, I expect that the next rakkerd will be out after this one has done gone platinum.

BQ: Do you have more than a one record deal with Capitol?

UH: Well, yeah, I'm one of their artists. I've got hundreds of songs in the can and I write more every day. Oh yeah. I've been working on a few this week. I always write. That's what I do.

BQ: Have you ever thought about pitching some of your songs to other artists?

UH: No, no. They'd just mess 'em up. I don't have to do that because I've got a rakkerd deal with the biggest, baddest rakkerd label on the planet. [The deal ended after this album - KB.]

BQ: You've got the final word. What would like our readers to know about the Life & Times of Unknown Hinson?

UH: Just that it's for real. It's the real thing. It's from the heart and mind of Unknown Hinson. I can back up everything that I write about. Yeh-yeh. I wrote it myself and I produce my own rakkerds and I call the shots. It's all Unknown Hinson all the time. Ain't nobody standing over me in the corporate boardrooms saying "Look here, you got to do this." No, I don't do it like that. I call the shots. I choose the songs, the ones I think should go on the rakkerd. Turn 'em in and they press 'em up. Real country-western music coming from the heart. I would like to say something to all the young wannabe songwriters, singers, and guitar players. If Unknown Hinson could give them any advice, I'd have to say: Practice your guitar, piana or whatever, at least a half hour a day. Don't give up because you never know. But most of all - try to avoid a prison sentence if humanly possible. Because your rakkerd sales will drop off if you go into the joint for 30 years like I done. Will you be putting a picture of me in there?

BQ: Yes, your publicist sent us a couple of excellent shots.

UH: If you put my picture on the cover, it'll sell more copies. I guarantee you.

Check out the website www.unknowhinson.com or http://www.myspace.com/unknownhinson.

Mail to: driguana1@msn.com. The preceding interview was conducted before Squidbillies was set to air, so this writer had no knowledge of it. When Unknown Hinson's heavily booked schedule clears out and time permits, we will attempt to do a follow-up interview with this intensely creative individual.

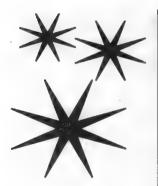
BRUTARIAN 48/49



Ramsey Campbell:



EXPLORING HORROR FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE STARS









Ramsey
Campbell should
never put all of his
literary awards on
one shelf—the weight
of the trophies
would probably
send it crashing to
the floor. Over the
years, he has won
the British Fantasy

Award numerous times, in addition to the World Fantasy Award, the Bram Stoker Award and the International Horror Guild Award. He has won all those honors by doing what he does best: writing terrifying stories and novels.

He was born John Ramsey Campbell on Jan. 4, 1946, in Liverpool, England, where he still lives with his wife, Jenny. He sold his first story, "The Church in High Street," in 1962 to August Derleth



of Arkham House for an anthology entitled Dark Mind, Dark Heart. In 1964, Derleth published Ramsey's first story collection, The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants—an impressive feat for a writer who was

still in his teens!

Campbell became a full-time writer in 1973, and has developed a body of work that includes many different types of fear fiction—Lovecraftian lore, psychological menace, erotic horror, ghost stories and more. He has written stories set in the universe of the Cthulhu Mythos and in his own community of Liverpool. He is as versatile as he is prolific, and he is still going strong.

BRUTARIAN: Your first story collection, The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants, was released by Arkham House while you were still a teenager. Tell us about your early association with August Derleth.

RAMSEY CAMPBELL: I'd written a handful of stories imitating Lovecraft as closely as I could. My friend Pat Kearney, the British fanzine editor and later historian of the Olympia Press, and the American fan Betty Kujawa suggested I should send them to Derleth for his opinion. I don't think I expected more than that—certainly not that

he would offer to publish them if I applied the detailed editorial suggestions he provided. I was even luckier to get such editing at the start of my career than I was to be published. I'd imitated Lovecraft's occasional stylistic excesses without taking anything like his care with structure: I'd even set the tales in Massachusetts when I'd never been out of England. I rid myself of all that to my and the world's considerable benefit.

BRUT: Your early work focused on Lovecraftian themes. Do you still enjoy and find inspiration in Lovecraft's works?

CAMPBELL: Very much so. He remains one of the crucial writers in the field. He united the American tradition of weird fiction—Poe, Bierce, Chambers—with the British—Machen, Blackwood, M.R. James. He devoted his career

to attempting to find the perfect form for the weird tale, and the sheer range of his work— • from the documentary to the delirious—is often overlooked. Few writers in the field are more worth rereading; certainly I find different qualities on different occasions. I recently read "The Outsider" to my wife to both our pleasures. I still try to capture the Lovecraftian sense of cosmic awe in some of my tales, and *The Darkest Part of the Woods* has a little of it, I think.

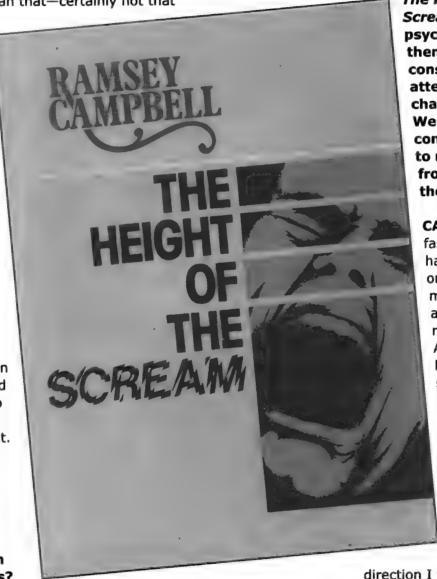
BRUT: Your second and third Arkham House collections, *Demons by Daylight* and

The Height of the Scream, employed psychological themes, with considerable attention to characterization. Were you consciously trying to move away from Lovecraftian themes?

CAMPBELL: As fast as I could. I had to deny him in order to discover my own themes and eventually to rediscover him. August Derleth had advised me to study M.R. James to tone down my excesses, but the great example from within the field was Fritz Leiber, I read Night's Black Agents when I was 16 and saw the contemporary

direction I wanted to take.

What Fritz did with Chicago, and later with San Francisco, I tried to achieve with Liverpool—the same sense that the everyday can be the source of terror rather than being invaded by it. Still, I'm glad I learned my craft by imitating others while I was homing in on what I had to say for myself.



BRUT: Your novels The Doll Who Ate His Mother and The Face That Must Die address the theme of a dormant evil that lurks just beneath the veneer of everyday life. Is that how you see the world—like an apple with a worm lurking inside?

CAMPBELL: I certainly think the everyday can cloak a great deal that people would rather not

acknowledge. I suppose I first dealt with the theme back in 1967, in my tale "The Scar," in the person of the neighbor who won't believe a father could maltreat his children and who drags them back for more. There's some of it in the novel I'm presently writing, Secret Stories.

BRUT: Let's talk about your firsts. What was the first novel you wrote and what was the first one to be published?

CAMPBELL: The first one I completed was the first to be published - The Doll Who Ate His Mother (written early 1975, published 1976). I'd already been writing published short stories for fourteen years, though, and I think that apprenticeship was crucial. I'd been edging towards a novel for a couple of years by writing longer stories with more complicated plots.

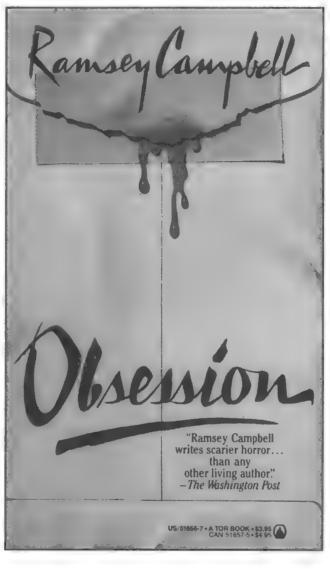
BRUT: How many publishers did you submit your first published novel to before it was accepted?

CAMPBELL: To my amazement, just one on each side of the Atlantic. Barbara Norville (Bob Bloch's old editor) bought it from my agent Kirby McCauley for Bobbs-Merrill, and in Britain Piers

Dugeon of Star Books (who had already done the first British edition of my second collection) picked it up for paperback. He then sold it on to Thom Tessier of Millington for hardcover. My second novel (*The Face That Must Die*) was rejected by all of them except Piers, though, as being too grim, and even he wanted to wait. His successor at Star picked it up when *Doll* sold well.

BRUT: How do you think the horror genre compares to other genres in receptiveness to first novels? Is it easier to get a first horror novel published?

CAMPBELL: These days I have no idea. My instinct is that it's unlikely to be easier. They're still published, though, even if not necessarily as horror see the splendid House of Leaves. I suspect that the genre has reverted to one of its natural states: the occasional new book from a mainstream publisher, often not generically packaged, and some of the most important from small specialist presses. (That's also how it was in the fifties when I became interested in the field.) For instance, a very good new first horror novel is Adam Nevill's Banquet of the Damned, and that's small press.



BRUT: Your story collection Scared Stiff practically invented the erotic horror genre. What thought processes went into the creation of a book of sexual horror stories?

CAMPBELL: Thought process may be dignifying it a little. My old friend Michel Parry was editing the Mayflower Books of Black Magic Stories and commented to me in a letter that nobody was submitting tales of sex magic. I thought I would,

and wrote "Dolls," which so disconcerted his publishers that they showed it to their lawyers for an opinion about possible obscenity. The lawyers cleared it, and I wrote several other such tales for Michel. It was dishonest of me to include so little of my favorite perversion, though. To some extent I rectified this in time for the expanded Tor edition of Scared Stiff. I still have a novel in mind, to be called *Spanked by Nuns*—a pity George Churchward isn't around to illustrate it.

BRUT: Do you have any story collections out? What is the market like for those?

CAMPBELL: Worse than it was. My most recent - *Told by the Dead* - wasn't picked up by my regular American publisher. It's available from PS, though, and theirs is the only edition I'm certain of.

BRUT: Your book *Midnight Sun* features a very unique monster—an ice demon. In fact, monsters play a major role in many of your stories and novels. Would it be fair to say you have a fascination with monsters? And if so, why?

CAMPBELL: I imagine I've always been fond of them. M.R. James' specters appealed to me in their inhumanity, and I fell in love with the paintings of Bosch at an early age—hardly surprising that I relished Lovecraft so much. In my own stuff they tend to be distorted versions or reflections of the characters who suppose themselves normal. In the Dreadstone/Leyton books I wrote—*The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Dracula's Daughter* and *The Wolfman* were all of them—I was intrigued to tell much of each story from the viewpoint of the monster.

BRUT: You've written numerous ghost stories, ranging from the traditional to the erotic. What is it about ghosts that attracts your attention? Do you believe ghosts really exist?

CAMPBELL: Like the monsters, my ghosts tend to be inextricably entwined with the psychology of the characters. If you'd asked me the second question last year I would have given you a pretty negative answer. This year, however, I've had several experiences in our guest room, which my wife and others already thought was haunted.

A coin fell from nowhere before my eyes onto the middle of the floor, something I would have taken for a kitten if we had pets sat next to me on the bed twice, and an object the size of a hand but lighter touched me on the shoulder. In the most alarming incident, I awoke to find my wife—whom I was giving time off from my snoring—had joined me in bed, and then I realized that the silhouette next to me under the cover was not my wife. If that was a nightmare, it was certainly by far the worst and most prolonged I've ever had.

BRUT: What differences do you see between British and American horror stories?

CAMPBELL: I don't see any significant differences these days. Any characteristics one might think national are usually true on the opposite side of the ocean as well. Perhaps the traditions have always developed in parallel. After all, Poe was refining the Gothic and concentrating on the psychological aspects around the same time Le Fanu was. Equally, there were ghastly hacks writing British library fiction while American pulp writers did their worst.

BRUT: You've worked on completing Robert E. Howard's Solomon Kane stories. What was it like, channelling Robert E. Howard? What did it take to get into that mindset?

CAMPBELL: Not much at all. Kirby McCauley, my agent, and Glenn Lord, for the Howard estate, suggested the task when I was in New York for the 1976 World Fantasy Convention. I read one fragment—"The Castle of the Devil"—while waiting to meet Jack Sullivan at the Staten Island Ferry, and by the time he arrived I'd come up with the rest of the plot. I didn't try to imitate Howard's style, but did my best to keep mine out of the way. I'm not sure that I entirely caught Kane's character, though.

BRUT: You've written under pseudonyms in the past—E.K. Leyton, Montgomery Comfort and Jay Ramsey. You've written novelizations of *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *The Wolfman* under pseudonyms. Why did you do that? Why not just use your real name?

CAMPBELL: The Universal monster movie novels

were commissioned by Piers Dudgeon of Star Books in London. The original idea was that I should write all six, but two werewolf novels would have been one too many, and since I can't swim, I wouldn't have been much use to the Creature from the Black Lagoon. At the time I didn't know to suggest David Schow. We therefore needed a house name, and I originally suggested Carl Thunstone, but Manly Wade Wellman felt people might think it was hiding him. Dreadstone was the compromise. For the record—and no matter how many times I say this, I seem to need to repeat myself-I did not write The Mummy, The Werewolf of London or The Creature from the Black Lagoon, and even Piers can't recall who did. As for Jay Ramsay, . it was to disquise my authorship of a single book for a different publisher, though it wasn't meant to fool anyone who might be interested. Eventually the novel involved—The Claw or Night of the Claw, depending on which side of the Atlantic-was reissued under my name.

BRUT: You've edited the work of others for anthologies and *Year's Best* collections. How does the fun of editing differ from writing for you? Is it easier or harder than your regular writing?

CAMPBELL: A good deal easier—the material is already there and I don't have to produce it. Well, I did write the final paragraph of a Frank Belknap Long tale, with his agreement. It's fun, as you say, to find the most meaningful arrangement for a collection of stories. The greatest satisfaction may be in discovering or helping new writers. I believe I was the chap who first saw Steve Rasnic Tem and Marc Laidlaw among others into professional print. Most recently I was delighted to bring Gary Fry to the world in Gathering the Bones along with Adam Nevill in his first non-pseudonymous work. I've just written the introduction to a very good supernatural novel of his, Banquet for the Damned, due from Pete Crowther's splendid PS Publishing.

BRUT: You've worked with Stephen Jones on some anthologies—did you always agree on selections for the books? If not, how did you settle disagreements?

CAMPBELL: We agreed nearly all of the time. If we didn't agree on a story, it didn't go in.

BRUT: What books are you reading now?

CAMPBELL: Presently Chuck Palahniuk's *Lullaby* and liking it. Recent pleasures have included Elizabeth Jane Howard's autobiography *Slipstream*—very frank on a variety of matters, though not quite as much about Robert Aickman as I hoped, and often moving—and John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, thanks to the enthusiasm of my friend Poppy Z. Brite. I loved it, and also her novel *The Value of X*, which may be set in a similar New Orleans but doesn't derive from Toole at all.

BRUT: What's in your pockets right now? Any items you carry for good luck?

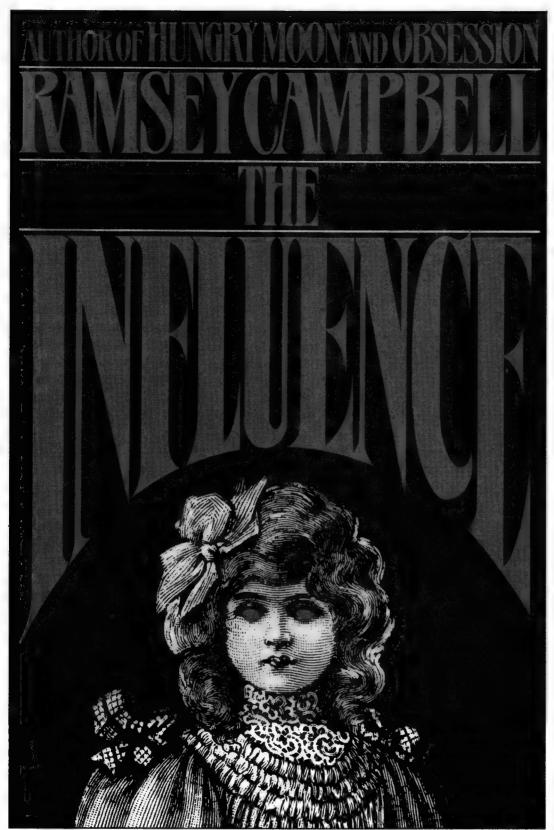
CAMPBELL: As I sit at my desk, very little. My wife and daughter and son are my luck, and I can't carry them about with me. Whenever I'm out I will be carrying at least two notebooks, one for the novel in progress or about to be, the other for random notions as well as any imminent or current short story. That's one of the few essentials I've learned in more than 40 years in this business—another is always to know what the first line to be written is going to be before I sit down to write it.

BRUT: If H.P. Lovecraft were alive today, what would he be doing for a living? Do you think he'd enjoy the Internet? Do you enjoy the Internet?

CAMPBELL: I should think he would be doing what any real writer does—writing. I know Dashiell Hammett was a sad exception. I've no idea what Lovecraft would have made of the Internet—he might have been fascinated or seduced by it. I'm both. Borges' notion of the Library of Babel has become reality, pretty well. Of course, one needs to be critically wary of it too, but I find it a great boon for research.

BRUT: Has the Internet changed the way you do business?

CAMPBELL: Certainly in terms of the ability to submit work attached to an email. I've also had a fair number of approaches via my web site at www.ramseycampbell.com. As a matter of fact, I'm amazed by the number of people who use the Internet but say they found it hard to track me



down. And used with skepticism where necessary, the Internet is a useful tool for research.

BRUT: Your work has been featured on British radio. Have any of your works ever made it onto TV or movie screens? Are

any slated for production?

CAMPBELL: My tale "The Seductress" was an episode of Ridley and Tony Scott's television series The Hunger. and quite faithful, I thought. Two novels have been filmed in Spain. The Nameless was adapted by Jaume Balaquero as Los Sin Nombre, and very unnerving it is. El Segundo Nombre (Second Name) sounds like a sequel but is in fact a version of Pact of the Fathers by Paco Plaza. This, too, is actually bleaker than the original novel, which suggests that the filmmakers' creative hearts are decidedly in the right place. Both films are available on Region 2 DVDs. The Influence is in development at Universal, Joe Dante's office once contacted my agent about Ancient Images, but nothing came of that—a pity. Many years ago Fred Olen Ray expressed interest in "The Moon-Lens."

BRUT: What did you publish in 2004?

CAMPBELL: The Overnight, a new supernatural novel from PS Publishing. A new edition of Alone with the Horrors from Tor with a considerably expanded Introduction. Delirium Books will bring

out a very limited edition of *The Parasite* with an extra 7,000 words, two chapters that were deleted from the novel. *Secret Stories* will be done soon, too.

BRUT: Any last words?

CAMPBELL: At the end of the last century I may have given some people the idea that I'd abandoned my field. I don't think I ever have, and I've certainly no plans to do so.

APHRODITE

By Corrine De Winter

Oh, this heavy hair could strangle you. Last night I was spitting out Pieces of my tongue, and they were like Overripe fruit on the ground, And I thought the birds would come And carry them away. Oh, then They would be full of poetry, They would be swollen with beauty And a harsh naivety.

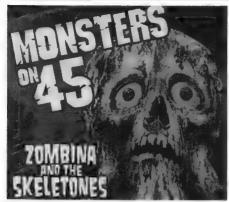
They call me Aphrodite
Although I cannot swim, I cannot
Hold my breath under water
And the mermaids want to kill me.

Do I remember my first dawn?
Barely, but that there was a deafening music,
Little cherubim pulled at my curls
And a gull placed a string of pearls
Around my throat.

I was to symbolize the world's love, But even love, being half-myth, Was a thing of fiction to me.

I had learned of humanity And longed to live on its shore, To drink with the sailors And be bruised by passion.

But no one, nothing, Would let me come down.



And You Shall Look upon Their Ghastliness And Be Enchanted:

Zombina and The Skeletones

By Dominick Salemi

hey're creepy and they're kooky, mysterious and spooky; but not at all, even remotely, ooky. Given their garish fashions; however, you might be forgiven for concluding that Zombina and company are a groovie-ghoulie band playing novelty, horror-themed rock. While the lyrics do betray a fascination with such decidedly morbid subjects as death and; suicide and oh yes, monsters, the music is rather peppy, even, dare we say it, poppy. Moreover, there's a decidedly 50s sensibility to much of this; and the punk elements veer closer to Blondie and The Ramones than The Cramps or 45 Grave. That's surprising for a combo spitting up as much blood as they do onstage; still, perhaps that's how one builds a cult reputation: by confounding audience expectations

Brutarian: As your debut disc kicks off with a variation on a classic American television riff, we were wondering whether you'd settle a cultural debate raging for ages here in the States, to wit: which show was better (and why) The Munsters or The Addams Family?

Zombina: It's impossible to choose. We actually posed that same question in the lyrics to one of our old songs, "You'd Scream If You Knew What I Did Last Halloween" (Monsters On 45 isn't actually our debut, we've been going since the nineties). It's really difficult to say which is better. The Addams Family seems more subtle and original; but The Munsters are louder and more entertaining. It's hard enough to say who lived in

the coolest house. The Addams?

Doc: I'm gonna say the Munsters because Herman reminds me of myself.

Brutarian: One of the reasons we wanted to interview the band was our fascination with your stage show as it appears you place a great deal of emphasis on it. Most performers eschew this; but we think that performing means more than just a faithful recreation of the sound of the discs.

Doc: Regardless of how you dress it up, rock n' roll is never going to be a sophisticated art-form; it's supposed to be dumb, and that's the whole point. People forget that. Just cos you can play a guitar or whatever, it doesn't make you a genius; it's not rocket science. You're meant to be entertaining people. A rock show is not a recital...

Zombina: The idea of not putting on a show, just expecting people to watch you stand there playing your instrument seems sort of arrogant, doesn't it? Going out in front of an audience wearing a t-shirt, with no face paint on, and no fake blood or anything, just seems crazy to us. The best rock n' roll is all gimmick driven: Little Richard, KISS, The B-52's. Even The Ramones had a stage show; although standing perfectly still was a large part of it. They used to rehearse that in front of a mirror!

Brutarian: How does one get primed (ready) for a Zombina & Skeletones' show? How does

one dress apropriately? Jeans and a t-shirt would seem to be a tacky choice for attending a Z&S performance.

Zombina: Jeans and a t-shirt is fine. Wear what you like. It's not about how you dress on the outside; you just need to be primed mentally. There's really no dress code at a Zombina and the Skeletones show. Just be prepared: get stupid, don't try to be cool, don't fold your arms, smile if you want, dance, and don't take it too seriously!

Doc: That said, we love it when people turn up in stupid Halloween costumes. We encourage masks and leotards and vampire blood, stuff like that!

Zombina: Yeah.

Brutarian: Looking at the band, one would expect something along the lines of The Cramps, a kind of psychobilly-garage rock sound; but the band is actually much more stylistically diverse and the debut disc shows that off to great affect. Comment on that if you would, and talk about your musical influences and how the band came together.

Zombina: The Cramps were actually the first band we modeled ourselves on. They seemed so cool because they were so proud to be sleazy and tacky and so confident in doing their own thing. But just ripping them off would have defeated the point. I suppose it's a generational thing. The Cramps are all about the lost arts of garage, rockabilly and psychedelia, which is all cool stuff to us too; but we were born much later, so we end up referencing soul music, cock rock, two-tone, new wave, and power pop as well in our music.

Doc: Between us we've got some ill-fitting influences but they seem to work together: Devo, The Revels, Brian Wilson, Black Sabbath, Shangri La's, Link Wray, White Zombie, Screamin' Lord Sutch, The Primitives, The Misfits, Oingo Boingo, Daniel Johnston, Prince, Nick Cave, The Cardiacs. They all end up in there somewhere.

Brutarian: Tell our readers about the origin of the band, how the look was developed and how you came up with the name, if you would be so kind.

Doc: I and Zombina started the first version of the band in 1998. Zombina used to sing and play bass and I sang and played guitar. For a little while we were a three

piece with a drummer or a drum machine depending on the availability of human beings. We were originally calling ourselves The Deformed, but at the second or third show we came up with the name Zombina And The Skeletones which we put to an audience vote and it got the bigger cheer. We met Jonny Tokyo right after that, at a party, playing requests on a Bontempi organ. We'd never even thought about organs as part of our sound, but he was a weird fifteen year old boy who seemed to be able to instantly play any song that was shouted out at him, in this wild hypnotic style, so we press ganged him into joining on keyboards and the three of us have played together ever since with about a million different Zombina and the Skeletones line-ups since then...

Brutarian: We found you through My Space; but we constantly troll that site for new bands; how did you go about making a splash on My Space? And what advice would you offer other bands, given the seemingly tens of thousands of acts on there now, on how to go about getting noticed? It has to be more than just asking everybody and their sister on the site to be your friend, right?

Zombina: My space is so great for promoting a band. Like when MP3.com was still cool. Sometimes we do the trawling thing too, and pick up as many punk bands, horror fans, club nights and magazines as we can. After a certain point you can just sit back and let it grow. The trick is really just to pal up with other bands; it becomes like a fan sharing network. If somebody likes a band, they'll usually have a glimpse at the bands in their friends list, and if you've got a big long weird band name like us, you'll find yourself getting clicked on a lot. And if you've got free music on your page, which you should have, people will know right away if they dig it or not. If they don't they click the back button, if they like it, they friend you. It's so simple!

Brutarian: One of the songs on the disc raises the interesting, perhaps inadvertent question of putting art first. To be truly committed to your art, as the band appears to be here, do you have to raise your involvement with it to primacy, that is, put it ahead of friends, family and gulp, love itself? That is, is your art, your creative life, your one and really only true love?

Doc: That was very much the case when I wrote the song "I Love Rock N' Roll." At that time it felt like

music was the only thing in the world worth pursuing and it should be put before everything else. I've grown up a lot since then and realized that this isn't true, you also have to make room in your life for truly important things like comic book reading and Roger Corman movies. Otherwise you'll have nothing to write about and your songs will end up as just one sentence, repeating over and over again...

Brutarian: Suicide is playfully mocked in one song, a wonderful song by the way, but it provoked this question: Is there any subject that cannot be ridiculed, satirized or poked fun at? Child molestation? Torture or rape (Tarrantino in Pulp Fiction handled the latter)? Holocausts in Rwanda and Germany?

Doc: Unfortunately, there's nothing playful about that song. "Counting On Your Suicide" was based on a crazy controlling girl I used to go out with who used to threaten to kill herself whenever we had a fight, as a sort of emotional blackmail thing. It sounds insensitive, but after a couple of years I couldn't help wishing she'd just do it and get it over with! That whole song's pretty serious and personal but for some reason everything I write comes out sounding comic, even when it's really not supposed to. At the same time, since you're asking, we reckon no subject should be taboo in art. It's been said a million times, but if something offends you, you don't have to watch or listen to it. The whole point of art is communication and the sharing of ideas, and the whole point of censorship is limiting the ideas that we're allowed to share, so that we can't communicate properly. If you want to say something but you're told you're not allowed to, then you're allowing yourself to be oppressed and that's quite sad.

Brutarian: When do you plan to play the States and how does one go about getting a date with Zombina?

Zombina: We're working on it! If everything goes ok, we'll be over next year for a tour. We've wanted to come and destroy America forever, we can't wait. We're pretty easy to book, if there are any promoters reading who want in on the action. Just contact us through the website: www.zombina.com

Brutarian: You are all obviously huge horror fans and it appears that horror is undergoing something of a revival in Hollywood at the moment. A few years ago, you'd have to wait months for anything remotely of a horrific nature to be released, now we're getting a half dozen a month. Agree? Disagree? And do you think the quality level is any better? We certainly have great hope for the slasher/gore subgenre what with that French guy who did High Tension and followed it with what we thought was a terrific refashioning of The Hills Have Eyes. Even cheapies like Wrong Turn (mutant hillbillies in the backwoods) seem to have more pizazz and inventiveness then the B-films of just a few years ago.

Doc: The odd good B-Movie still shows up; I wasn't into Saw, but Snakes On A Plane rocks. I saw a British film not long ago called Dead Man's Shoes that I think may be a few years old but it's ultra-low budget and completely amazing. I get the feeling it won't have made it to America, but if it has everyone should watch it. The whole re-make thing is sick, though. We actually enjoyed the Hills Have Eyes, but most of those things are just mindless, they've all been translated into dumbed-down, short-attention span, speed-cut crap. Psycho was the worst, they ruined Dawn Of The Dead, Texas Chainsaw sucked....

Zombina: The Wickerman remake is going to be terrible; but we're gonna see it anyway. We end up goin to see 'em all. I sorta got into House Of Wax... Only really seedy studios like Troma and whoever made Easter Bunny Kill Kill seem still make good B-movies these days. We finally managed to get ourselves on a Troma soundtrack, which has been a dream of ours for years. They've used "Red Planet" on the soundtrack to Poultrygeist: The Night Of The Chicken Dead, which is about zombie chickens taking over a fast food restaurant and stars Ron Jeremy. It looks like it's gonna be some kinda masterpiece.

Brutarian: Ok, we have to ask this of guys and gals from the UK, what are your favorite Hammer films? Favorite Universal films?

Zombina: We've just been watching Dracula: Prince of Darkness, that one's pretty cool. The Wicker Man is my favorite, it's not Hammer but it's Christopher Lee and it's from the same sort of time. We were going through a bit of a Hammer phase when we did our first album Taste The Blood Of Zombina and the Skeletones, which was a play on Taste The Blood of Dracula. There's a song on there called 'Christina,' which is all about the deformed barmaid character from Frankenstein Created Woman. I love the Tod Browning Dracula too, but I think the first Wolf Man film is the best Universal horror.

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Doc: I'm a sucker for anything Karloff-related like the Mummy and the Killer, or any of the Frankenstein films. The best stuff's the films William Castle or Ed Wood made, a lot of the oddball indie B-movies beat Universal at their own game just by being weirder and more shocking.

Brutarian: And, as we're on the subject of films, you said in an interview that one of our faves, Return of the Living Dead, had a strong influence on the band. How so?

Zombina: When I first met Doc, but we weren't playing music, we used to rent horror videos every night and not really do anything else. It was after watching Return Of The Living Dead that we saw the connection between zombies and punk rock, and we started a band the next day. I think that's what happened, anyway.

Doc: The soundtrack album's so cool. The main reason we rented Return Of The Living Dead in the first place is 'cos the box showed The Cramps, The Damned Roky Erickson, and TSOL all on the soundtrack. It also clued us into 45 Grave who became role models for us, like The Cramps. We played with Dinah Cancer's other band, Penis Flytrap, in Germany. She's a god.

Brutarian: Originally you said you were forced to play a number of ill-suited gigs with hardcore punk bands. It's an interesting story of how the band took it upon themselves to get out of that rut. Our readers would love to hear how you took the bull by the horns on this.

Zombina: When we first started, the only sort of bills we seemed to be able to get ourselves on were either with death-metal type hardcore bands, or Oasisstyle indie/brit-pop kinda things, and we seemed to get on better with the metallers. Just not so much with their audiences, who used to just shout, "Slayer!" So we decided to set up our own regular night, which was called USELESS, where the Skeletones could play, and we could choose the music, and put on a few of the other odd bands that didn't fit into the metal thing or the Oasis thing, or any other scene. It started off quiet, but once people started showing up; it became quite a big deal. We started showing old cartoons, and having fancy dress competitions, and putting on the weird bands that we meet on tour. The night ran for three years and never made any money, which was pretty punk rock of us.

Doc: All Liverpool bands seem to have their own night, now. The whole pay-to-play in-house-promoter

thing is pretty much dead around here. I feel like we helped get the new artist-driven system in place. Almost all the bands that played at USELESS started up nights of their own soon afterward.

Brutarian: GWAR talked about the problems of transporting and stage managing blood, what have you learned about such a messy theatrical prop?

Zombina: We went to see GWAR last year and got puked on by a demonic baby. It was the best night of our lives. We're nowhere near as messy with the blood as they are. We tend to use it as a make-up effect, and it just dribbles on the stage equipment a bit, which some venues don't like; but we usually get away with. But GWAR have actual powerful jets of the stuff shooting right to the back of the room all the way through the show, which must be quite difficult to manage. We're all very polite and English and working on a very small budget, so we don't make that much of a mess; although we'd really like to.

Doc: Some promoters have stopped booking bands that are associated with 'horror punk' because they expect to have their clubs drenched in slime. Sometimes people will assume that we're going to destroy everything; but like she said, we're dead polite and respectful. We will absolutely fuck up your carpet with blood and make-up, but the walls will be fine, and the stains in the backstage sink will come out after a while.

Brutarian: From Liverpool, eh? Weren't The Beatles . . . hmmmm, so what's happening with the Liverpool scene at the moment? Are the Skeltones and Zombina spearheading a rock and roll revival?

Doc: I feel like we're closer to the spirit of the original Merseybeat bands like The Undertakers and The Skeletons than anything that's around today. Liverpool had a thriving R&B punk scene full of novelty rock n' roll bands doing the costumes n' harmonies bit until the Beatles came and fucked it up for everyone. The Undertakers changed their name to The Takers and stopped coming out of coffins and The Skeletons ended up as The Lads or something... Zombina and the Skeletones is sort of traditional pre-Beatles Liverpool music. Sort of.

Zombina: Since all the bands have started nights, there's about a hundred Liverpool scenes, like little groups of bands that all play the same bills. There's a

little bit of everything going on if you know where to look for it. In terms of rock n' roll, there are getting to be a few proper old school rock n' roll bands...

The Silhouettes are like a doo-wop girl band, Doktor Combover do Las Vegas Grind style stuff, Blue Demon do rockabilly. The V.C's are surf rock. It doesn't really seem like a revival or a movement or anything, though, just a few bands getting into similar things at the same time. If anybody wants to hear something from the stranger side of the Liverpool scene, check out the weirdest band in the world, a.P.A.t.T, featuring our very own Jonny Tokyo. Or Jettison's other band, Lovecraft. They'll send you crazy! There's links to all those bands I just said on www.myspace.com/zombinaandtheskeletones













An Interview With Peter S. Beagle

By Jayme Lynn Blaschke

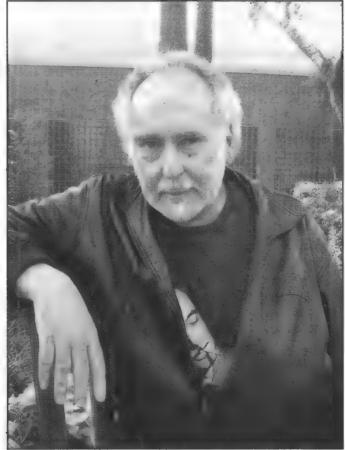


Photo by Jayme Lynn Blaschke

Legendary fantasist Peter Beagle wrote his first novel, A Fine and Private Place, at the age of 19 and since then has published consistently for the better part of five decades. Best known for the landmark novel The Last Unicorn, Beagle also wrote the screenplay for the animated film version of the book as well as the script for the Ralph Bakshi version of Lord of the Rings and the popular episode "Sarek" from Star Trek: The Next Generation. His published works include the novels Folk of the Air, The Innkeeper's Song and Tamsin as well as the collections Giant Bones, The Rhinoceros Who Quoted Nietzsche and The Line Between. Beagle currently lives in Oakland, Calif.

The Line Between is your most recent book, a collection of reprints and originals. How would you characterize these collected stories?

Well, new is one. Except for a couple of hundred words everything in the book has been written since 1999, and nothing in it has been collected before. All but one are fantasies—the one that isn't is a Sherlock Holmes story I was asked to write—but if they really have anything in common it's that I've tried to give all of them as realistic a background as possible. There is one story which could be considered a young adult piece that has to do with time and magic, for example, but it is set in current-day suburban America just as solidly as I could manage. And there is another set in a world I've entirely made up, but it, too, is grounded in a lot of realistic detail. For me that's always necessary, to set up a background so believable that if something out of the ordinary happens, that'll somehow be believable too. It's a trick, but you have to get it just right.

That's what the title *The Line Between* is about—the line between what we take for ordinary quotidian daily life and that thing that happens at the corner of your eye, that thing you *couldn't possibly* have seen, but nevertheless....

I used to read Mary Norton's *Borrowers* books to my kids. Norton was so good with detail because

she thought the Borrowers out, and children love detail. Norton's command of what the world would look like if you were the size of a pencil is so accurate, so believable, that every now and then I'd see one or more of my children just nod quietly as I was reading a passage of description to them: "Yes, that's the way it would be." I'm always trying to get that nod from adults, from children. That nod is what matters.

"Two Hearts," your follow-up to The Last

Unicorn, won the 2006
Hugo Award for best
novelette. You'd never
even been nominated
for a Hugo before, and
now you own one.
Were you surprised
when they announced
your name?

I was so convinced that Cory Doctorow or Howard Waldrop would win the novelette Hugo that when my name was read out, it literally didn't register-I simply didn't hear it. I actually had to be shoved toward the stage, and all the way up there I kept thinking. Don't trip--whatever else you do, do NOT fall on your ass! Because I know what I'm capable of. But somehow I managed all right.

"Two Hearts" is a featured story in The Line Between. What was it like revisiting the world of the unicorn when you hadn't been

there for--what, more than 30 years now?

It wasn't what I expected. I'm an older person, a different person to some degree and I'm not telling this story in the style in which I told *The Last Unicom*. That book managed, at its best, to be both a fairy tale and a spoof on fairy tales. I was playing with all the standard figures, events, and tropes

of classic fantasy but trying to do something else with them. With "Two Hearts," however, we have a straightforward story which is not a spoof. It's about a nine-year-old, 10-next-month little girl on a quest of her own, and it's dead serious because she is quite serious, and she's the person telling us the first-person tale. She happens to encounter Schmendrick and Molly and a very old King Lir who aid her on her journey. It becomes the four of them and the girl's dog—on whose ears she literally cut her teeth—against a griffin. I expected it to be much

harder to do than it was, much more difficult for a lot of reasons, but in fact I had a wonderful time and didn't have any problem at all in writing about Schmendrick and Molly and Lir again.

Schmendrick and Molly have been together for quite a while, and the girl takes them for married. As Molly confides to her: "I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man in the world--He eats wild radishes in bed! Crunch crunch crunch! All night! Crunch crunch crunch!" And you're left to wonder how Molly knows that he eats wild radishes in bed....

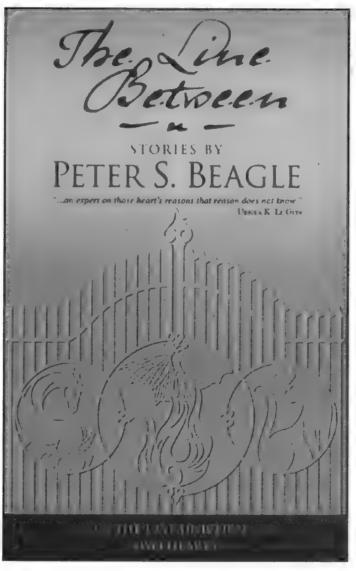
That's a nice touch-that's typical of
the little character
moments you put into
your stories.

Oh, that's the most fun. Of course it is. On the one hand it's making

the characters that much more real, but on the other hand it's just plain fun as a writer.

I understand that "Two Hearts" is a bridge between The Last Unicorn and a new, untitled novel?

I ended the story with a kind of gift that Molly



gives to the little girl, Suze. It's not anything physical--it's a bit of music. And she tells her to memorize the music but then keep it inside, and never sing it or whistle it out loud, not until she is 17 years old. "When you whistle this little bit of music," Molly says, "someone will come to you. I don't know who it will be, but someone will come to you." So in the follow-up novel I'm going to pick Suze up at the age of about 17 and see what happens to

her. She's just too good of a character to leave in that one story.

So the idea of this new book was born out of writing "Two Hearts"?

Yeah. I didn't expect to go further, but sometimes a character takes hold of you. It happens to me a lot. Nine, almost 10-year-old Suze is so much herself that I do want to know what happens to her, what she grows up to be.

You've said for years that you don't write sequels, but now you've got Giant Bones, which was a follow-up to Innkeeper's Song, you've got "Two Hearts" and the follow-up novel... Why now? Is this the result of your maturing as a writer?

Giant Bones isn't exactly a follow-up. It's just a collection of stories set in the same world as *The Innkeeper's Song*. I got started on them because I was asked to do a story for an anthology of fantasy and science fiction set around vocal music. Now, I have always loved the songs and style and persona of a particular French singer-songwriter named Georges Brassens. Brassens has been dead for 25 years, and he's a bigger star than ever in France-

-but he's not really a star. He's folklore. People like Gabriel Marcia Marquez refer to him as the best poet working in France. I learned French from Brassens' songs, and a good deal about music, too.

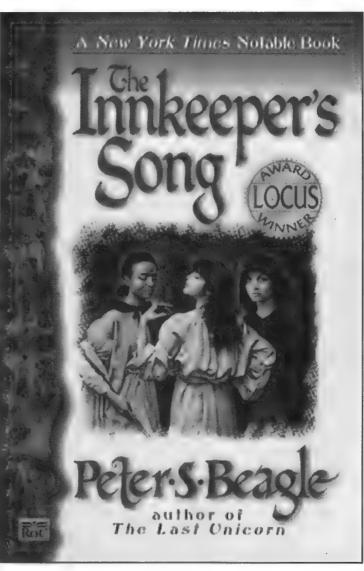
I couldn't resist, given the opportunity, taking Brassens as a character and setting a version of him in that world I had made for *The Innkeeper's Song*. The story ("The Last Song of Sirit Byar") came out so well and I had such a good time

writing it that I began

looking for excuses to write more stories in that world. I put six of them together to create Giant Bones, which, by the way, is called The Magician of Karakosk everywhere else in the world and will be called that here, too, when it gets reissued. There have been several more stories set in this world since then--one, "Quarry," is in The Line Between-and I'll eventually have enough for another collection. But I don't think of them as sequels or prequels at all, since they aren't, really, even when they involve some of the characters from the original book. It's just a kind of a personal playground.

As for writing "Two Hearts" and the new novel, both of them follow-ups to *The Last Unicorn-*-that I blame entirely on my business

manager, Connor Cochran. He just nagged me into it. He wanted a special story to publish as a promotional item to go with the unabridged *Last Unicorn* audiobook, and to hush my objections he told me, "It just has to be in that same world. You don't have to have anything to do with the original *Last Unicorn* characters." But I found myself writing about those characters again anyway.



BRUTARIAN 48/49

Do you ever feel like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, that the unicorn is your personal version of Sherlock Holmes? You've said elsewhere that you aren't a particularly huge fan of unicorns.

It's not quite the same thing, although it's a legitimate question. **James** Stephens--one of my very favorite writers--got so tired of being known only for a very successful novel. The Crock of Gold. overshadowing several other novels which were very good of his, that he just quit writing novels altogether. He spent the last 25 years of his life writing poetry and broadcasting for the BBC, which I'm really sorry about, although he was a fine poet.

I know Conan Doyle came to hate Sherlock Holmes really acutely. He wrote historic fiction which he was very proud of, a lot of different stories set in different places, and he wrote the Professor Challenger stories. And yet there was this goddamn Holmes that was all people wanted to hear! He really did make a serious effort to kill him off. He was only pressured into bringing him back.

No, I don't feel like that about the unicorn at all. It's

more like--and I've said this often--something Robert Nathan once said to me. The Last Unicom is dedicated to Robert, and he called me when he read the book. He said to me, "You're going to be stuck with this the way I'm stuck with *Portrait*

> of Jennie." Robert wrote close to 40 novels. Portrait of Jennie is not the best one, but it was made into a movie with Jennifer Jones and Joseph Cotton about 10 years after he'd written it, and thanks to that it is still considered a minor classic. Robert said, "There are times when I hate that book, because it overshadowed so much better stuff I did, and I know I did better stuff, and you'll do better stuff than The Last Unicorn. Other times I think of all the wonderful things that happened to me because of Portrait of

> > Jennie, and I know

I can't possibly hate it. You'll go back and forth with the unicorn forever. There'll be people that know this book and don't know that you ever wrote everything else. That's just the way it is. It's undoubtedly better to be remembered for one book than not remembered at all."

So, it's a mixed-bag kind of thing. The Last Unicorn has opened doors, and it's given me generations of readers that I never imagined having. But it was a nightmare to write, as I've told audiences often, and there

are books like The Innkeeper's Song that matter more to me in a personal sense. In a way, I think of



The Innkeeper's Song as my first grown-up book. That's a personal meaning--I don't know how else to explain it.

So, no overwhelming compulsion to write "This Day All Unicorns Die"?

(Laughing) No, no nothing like that! I do, however, belong to a small, informal group dedicated to writing stories that have no bloody elves in them! That's another matter. The word we use isn't "bloody" either! That's bad enough in England.

You write a lot of short fiction, and are well-known for your novels. What differences do you find in writing short fiction as opposed to novels?

Well, apart from the obvious fact that novels take longer, the proportions are just different. You pace yourself in a different way. I'm usually good with beginnings and endings of novels--I just have to watch the middle, which, if I'm not careful, can get a little saggy.

Short stories are more like poems--they have to be just right. I don't know how to explain this, but I've always thought of the novel in some ways as the idiot's form. You can make so many mistakes in a novel, and yet if the impetus, the spring, the compulsion, the tension is good enough, you can get away with it. I know a lot of really good novels written by writers who...well, if they were baseball players, you'd say they had holes in their swings. My father turned me on to Theodore Dreiser who had absolutely everything wrong with his style, but he's so intense and so passionate that he kind of beats you into submission. Now I would never want to write like that, and I don't read a lot of Dreiser for amusement, but he was important.

You've also written a good number of essays, some of which were collected in Smeagol, Deagol and Beagle, others in The Rhinoceros Who Quoted Nietzche. Does non-fiction use different tools? Are you a different writer when writing essays?

I'm not exactly a different writer then, but yeah. I learned to write personal essays as a very practical means of feeding my family. I was working

as a magazine journalist and I fortunately had very sympathetic editors who would give me jobs and then damn near teach me how to do those jobs. It was great training, because I'd be told, "You can write about anything, but you've got to keep it to 3,000 words." Well, you learn what 3,000 words is and what you can do without. You simply don't have room to get sloppy, or to get self-indulgent or self-inflating or maudlin or anything like that. Movies are an economical field in that way, too, in terms of writing. It's very significant to me that when William Goldman did the script for The Princess Bride based on his own novel, he took out just about all the stuff I'd always regarded as excess and digressive and self-indulgent in the novel itself. That screenplay, that film as it's done, is perfect... or as near perfect as you can get.

That's actually a nice segue into my next question. You've written for television and movies--do you approach that creative process differently than you do with prose?

It's different in a lot of ways, because when you're writing a book or story, you have the biggest budget of all. I mean, in my short story "Salt Wine" I can go from Cuba to India to Buenos Aires and have no concern about exterior or interior shots, or blowing the entire budget on one particular day's work. With both television and movies, however, I was always told, "that exterior scene has to come indoors, and so does that one, or you're going to bust the budget right there." That's one basic difference.

Of course with anything--fiction, non-fiction, writing prose--basically, it's just you. It's not a collaborative medium. Oh, with any luck you have a decent editor and a first reader. And you've got to deal with publishers. But basically, it's just you. In the movies, you have to be aware of other people. "There's no point in putting this scene in there, because so-and-so the executive producer is just not going to like that. There's no point to it." You have to think about all the stuff that has nothing to do with the work.

The privacy of writing a book is something that really matters to me. On the other hand, generally speaking, you make infinitely less money. It's like the difference between writing a play and writing a film script: If you write a theatrical play, you're god. Nobody can change that. Nobody--not a word-by the terms of the Dramatists' Guild. There's a standard contract, and all a producer or director can do is try to talk you into changes. In movies,

though, anybody can change your script, and you'll never know who did it. But you know, in the theater, unless you're very lucky, you'll only make a fraction of the money you'd make writing film scripts. So it's a toss-up.

After they announced Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings movie project, I went back and watched the DVD of Ralph Bakshi's Lord of the Rings animated movie, which you wrote the script for. I watched for the script, to see what you did, and I have to say that despite the film's shortcomings, I was impressed at how lean a distillation your version was. How did you approach the compromises necessary to turn this "impossible to film" novel into a movie script?

Well, the thing you always have to deal with--just as I had to when adapting the *The Last Unicorn*—is that animation hates to sit still. Animation hates backstory or explanations. You could make a case that the real *Lord of the Rings* is the backstory. That what gets filmed is a fraction of Tolkien's backstory and there's no way around it: information has to be passed from one person to another, one group of people to another, let alone the different cultures that have to be explained. I can remember telling Ralph Bakshi, "You know, we're two thirds of the way through this damn thing and we haven't gotten to the Riders of Rohan yet." Bakshi just groaned as if he'd been shot: He'd forgotten about the riders, *completely*.

I was constantly cutting and cutting and cutting-wincing as I did it--just trying to keep the trail of the story, the skeleton that made sense. I can't tell you how many versions of that script I did, but I know that I was still working on it in London at 2:30 in the morning of the day that we were supposed to start recording the actors.

Do you find it harder, easier or no different to adapt someone else's work to script form than your own?

Oddly enough, I suspect I do better with other people's prose than my own. I'm a good literary mimic. What standup comedians can do with celebrity voices, I can do with somebody else's writing style, because I spend so much time thinking about style. There are much harder styles to imitate than Tolkien's, because he's so heavily

influenced by the Bible, by Scandinavian Finnish epics. You can fall into those cadences,--sometimes he himself overdoes it.

The Lord of the Rings is a work of paradox. I think it is a work of genius, but I don't think of Tolkien as a genius--just a brilliant man with a hell of a lot of intellectual horsepower, intellectual energy. A lot of the time he falls back way too much on Biblical rhythms--at least way too much for me--but it makes him easy to do in pastiche, so to speak. Although most of what's up on the screen in that Bakshi film is Tolkien, I patched it up or glided over stuff here and there, and made transitional paragraphs. But most of it is Tolkien.

In watching the first two movies in the Peter Jackson trilogy, it struck me that they made certain script choices solely to avoid following the same path your script took. Have you watched those movies with an eye for the script choices they made?

I do that all the time. A lot of the stuff they invented--especially as it related to Arwen and Aragorn--I thought was flat-out wrong. There are things I don't think they needed to do. The whole possibility of Aragorn having been killed just seemed absolutely pointless. It's glaring in a movie that is, by and large, done that well. I really think that's as good a Tolkien that anybody's going to get on screen, ever--but it's not the Tolkien you have in your head. It can't be. There are places where, for one reason or another, I think they just went off the beam entirely. It's not major in the development of this epic, but perhaps because it's not major, you are more aware of it.

There were a number of odd detail choices here and there, almost as if the scriptwriters felt compelled to put their own stamp on the material.

Perhaps. And they don't really know what to do--with the exception of Eowyn, who at least has something to do--with Tolkien's women, not anymore than he did. They're trying desperately to get Arwen more involved in the action.

They originally filmed the Helm's Deep scenes with her fighting there.

Yeah, I know. She has no business there. And

Galadriel is just a beautiful one-shot. But to keep going back to the whole image of Elrond insisting that Arwen leave with the elves, it's an attempt at building suspense and I think it falls flat.

But I dearly loved seeing my old acquaintance Christopher Lee going one-on-one with Ian McKellan. Christopher is immensely proud of that part, and really pissed at not being in the third movie. Because he was filmed, and they cut it out. They did film the Scouring of the Shire.

Rumors persist of a Last Unicorn live-action movie. Your script is attached, as I understand it, and some test animation even surfaced online a few years ago.

Yes. And while the script could use some more work, the online special effects tests were just appalling. I really can't go into this for legal reasons right now, but those people are highly unlikely to ever do the movie, no matter what happens.

Yet another movie trapped in Development Hell?

Development Hell is a good phrase.

How does your musical background nfluence your writing?

I think in terms of music while I'm working a great deal. I was talking about this today. I do think in terms of passages of prose as woodwinds or brass or string quartet. Even in my first book I thought very consciously in terms of voices playing against each other, like a chamber group. I think constantly of speech rhythms. I'll walk around the room speaking dialog or passages of description to myself to decide if I like the rhythm, if I like the

sound of it. The three things that seem to have run more or less constantly through my books are music, cats, and very old goddesses. In one of my upcoming novels, *Summerlong*, I did manage to get the cats out though--so I'm making progress.

Music has always mattered. I sing to myself constantly. I think about songs. I write them. I have--fortunately or unfortunately--a trash memory for all sorts of music, but particularly words with music. I'm always a sucker for getting drawn into

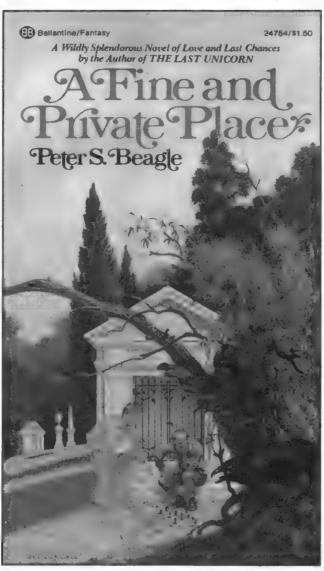
that, whether it's a musical or a song lyric. I did an opera libretto some 12 years back and enjoyed the experience immensely. It was something entirely new for me.

You, Charles de Lint, Michael Moorcock, Emma Bull... all wellknown fantasy authors who perform musically. What is it about fantasy that attracts musicians?

I honestly can't say. I know what it is for me, but even with having played with Charles and his wife MaryAnn a couple of times... We've never gone into it. We've never talked enough for me to know what pulled them into it. I'm aware of Emma Bull and other people who turn out to love to write songs. I can only think it's the seduction of music. If you can sing or play at all, well, it's just a sensuous thing, music.

Whether you're performing for a large audience or around a fire, essentially it involves other people. Other musicians. Other listeners. Maybe that's part of it, because as I've said, writing is such a solitary business.

I always envy a thing I see happen with musicians, whether it's a jazz group or string quartet. If the music is going well, you can see them smile at each other. It's a particular smile, and



they're sharing. It's as if they are all surfers riding the same wave. By and large, novelists don't get to do that.

You're a big fan of Chet Atkins I understand?

Oh yeah. There's Chet Atkins, Jerry Reed, Guy van Duser, all manner of finger style guitarists whom I love, but jazz guitarists as well, and classical guitarists. It's the one instrument I know well. I know people who can listen to a symphonic recording and tell you with astonishing accuracy not only what orchestra it is, but who's conducting. I can't come close to that. But I've got a fighting chance of telling you who the guitarist is. You can know Chet Atkins almost immediately by the sound. You can know Jerry Reed by the second bar, just because other people build up speed, and Reed is going full tilt by the second or third note.

No matter which song he's playing, he always sounds amused.

That's an interesting point. Yeah. Reed sings along with himself, scats with himself. There's a moment when he's playing a particular tune of his own where he just bursts out laughing for pure pleasure. I don't understand why more people don't do that.

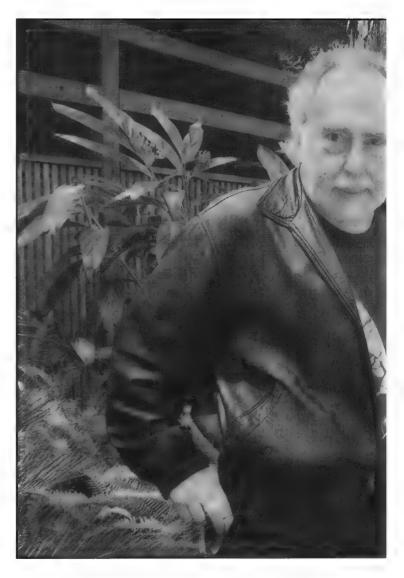
There's an album where he's doing one of his duets with Chet Atkins. Atkins is playing his solo and Reed's playing rhythm behind him, but he's so eager to join in that he jumps the gun and intrudes on Atkins' solo. You can hear Atkins say--also sounding genuinely amused--"Whoa! Back off!" And Reed's saying, "Oh, sorry!" also laughing, and a moment later comes in for his own solo.

Who would you describe your guitar style as closest to, or most influenced by?

Oh my. Who I would love to play like, if I possibly could, would be George Brassens, the Frenchman I mentioned earlier whom I learned to write songs from. Brassens almost never takes a solo, but he's got a very solid, quick, fierce rhythm style of playing that's always there, like a fine bass player.

I had, if you like, an epiphany in Nashville a couple of years back. I'm friends with a guitarist who's a wonderful musician—John Knowles. John worked with Chet Atkins, recorded with

him, arranged for him, composed with him. He plays country on a classical guitar, and is a good composer. If I had to pick the five top guitarists I see every year at the annual Chet Arkins celebration in Nashville, John would be number six. I remember watching him once and thinking, there's no way in the world, no matter how hard I try, that



I could ever play like Jerry Reed or, to be more practical, Thom Bresh--Merle Travis' son, who's usually there at the gathering--or Buster Jones, or Guy Van Duser. But if I really worked hard, if I gave it the kind of concentration that I give writing, maybe I could play like John.

Then I got rid of that thought in the next minute, because I thought, "No, we play what we are, and John's quite possibly the most peaceful person I know. And his guitar style reflects that. No, there's no way I could play like that."

You've recorded and released one album of your own.

Not really an album. It's a cassette of a live performance I did back in 1986. Not all that good a performance, either.



Photo by Jayme Lynn Blaschke

You have a lot of reprint material coming back into publication these days--any chance of that album being reissued?

Not if I can help it! I'd much rather do an original album. I'm better than I was and I'd like to write more songs for it. I'd also like *not* to be fighting a cold and not to be just off a plane, playing a borrowed guitar while slightly crocked because of drinking wine to fight the cold.

No, I'm glad to have done it and glad people know of it, but I'm certainly not satisfied with it.

I'm just pleased that my younger daughter did the cover, and I made friends with Meg Davis who did the liner notes.

Well, that can be something for your fans to look forward to in the future, a new Peter Beagle album.

Oh, me too. I know a lot more first-rate musicians now than I did then, so with any luck I'll have enough good people on the album to cover for me.

What can you do now as a writer that you couldn't do at 19 writing your first novel?

Oh, there's a question! I can leave things out that I thought was necessary to put in. I can be more oblique. I no longer think it's necessary to make my point head-on. It's like the different ways people hit notes, whether singing or playing. There are a lot of ways to hit the same note: from the top, from the bottom, directly in the middle, sliding into it. I think I'm a more subtle writer than I was, and willing to deal head-on with scenes I simply couldn't handle at 19--and didn't. I was very clever at 19. I think I'm less clever now.

When you were 22 you had a writing internship at Stanford University with Larry McMurtry and Ken Kesey among others. You've said you felt out of your depth there, but what did you learn from that experience?

I learned what I couldn't do. Kesey and McMurtry and Gurney Norman and Jim Hall were all very much from somewhere, and could tap that. whereas I have the perspective of an immigrant's child. I could never be from the Bronx, where I'd grown up, the way Kesey was from Oregon, that Larry had forever been from Texas and Gurney and Jim were from Kentucky. I've written somewhere that I almost had to invent a world to be from, which is another reason, probably, why I took so easily to fantasy. I've said that a lot of kids grow up believing that they've simply been delivered to the wrong parents, that sooner or later their real parents will come for them--it's a standard fantasy. I never thought once that I'd gotten the wrong parents. I did think, though, that I might have been dropped on the wrong planet!

How do you challenge yourself as a writer?

Well, it always has to do with a kind of, "Okay, we're coming up on a scene that has to be here. I have never written such a scene and I'm going to hate this, but I have to do it. All right, let's see what we can do here." On the one hand, I inevitably have the kind of self-confidence that you have to have if you're going to do this for 45 years. On the other hand, I like--really like--writing challenges. Certainly more than I like them in my daily life. I'm always a sucker for a different form of writing, a different way of telling stories, something I haven't done. Can I do that? Maybe I can't, but it'd be worth trying.

In many ways, I'm a person out of the 19th century attitude toward literature and telling stories, and here I am in the 21st century. I was just getting comfortable in the 20th and they went and switched it on me! I have no idea what modernist or post-post-modernist really means. I'm uncomfortable with labels. I'll just use what's handy or what seems to fit this particular story at this particular moment.

You have some writing challenges you've been mulling but haven't yet taken up--there's the period Chinese story of the Yellow Emperor, and also the Elizabethan novel.

Oh, the Elizabethan novel... I don't think I'll ever do it, really, because that field is so crowded. There are so many good novels about that period, whether they're mysteries or just mainstream novels. I'm a buff for the period, certainly. I'm a Shakespeare buff, and I know a great deal about the people of that period, but I know writers who can make you *smell* that time, and I don't think I'm in that league.

I think I might have a better chance with a legend out of nearly-legendary China, which, if I write it, I'd be dealing with in a 21st century environment. Centuries ago there was an emperor --the Yellow Emperor--who began thinking of China as a unified country instead of a gang of warring states and minor lordlings, the same way that Italy eventually became a unified country, and Germany, too. Although the Yellow Emperor in all likelihood was a real person, the "Yellow Emperor" people tell stories about is folklore. His wife is supposed to have invented the Chinese language--there's lot of space for her in the legend, too, which is nice.

This isn't a setting or a folkloric tradition that you've worked in before.

Yeah. I've never done anything with Chinese mythology. I'd be setting the original legend against its realization, like a time bomb going off in the 21st century. It's just a spell, or a curse, that the Yellow Emperor put on the people from the other side of the mirror. But even spells laid on by the Yellow Emperor have only a certain shelf life. Eventually they wear thin. The legend has always allowed for that, that sooner or later there would be a second invasion.

It sounds like you've given this one a lot of thought.

Yes, I have, and sooner or later I'll have a go at it.

Okay, last question: What inspires you?

Sometimes just a silly phrase or a meaningless phrase, like "salt wine." Sometimes a notion out of a song. Sometimes a question. Sometimes playing with the practical requirements of a specific assignment. They're usually very small things, though. I never think of them as inspirations—just the grains of sand that eventually grow pearls around them, because that's the way that oysters are. It's never any big moment of, "Wow! What an inspiration!" It's like cooking, in some ways. You have a dish in mind, but you add a little of this and you add a little of that, and most often it comes out to be a somewhat different dish than you expected.

I can't say that any one particular thing can be guaranteed to inspire me. It's more like Richard Rogers being asked, "What comes first? The words or the music?" And Rogers said, very practically, "The phone call." Sandy Conn, the lyricist, was even blunter: "Which comes first? The check." It's the same thing. There's this saying I've quoted often, it's an old line among screenwriters, "If they ask you, you can write a song. Get the gig first, and then figure out how you do it." Having to meet a commitment is inspiration all by itself.

-XXX-

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By Nick Mamatas

My mother was the first to do it to me. I was a baby again, but full-sized, thirteen at the time, crammed into the crib, in a soiled diaper and howling, my face a purple mash. In a pink bonnet, and feetie pajamas, like a little girl. She was dreaming it, but I was the one who woke up screaming, sheets wet and cold against my t-shirt and ass, my knees tucked under my chin. Mom barreled in to my room, just the way she had done in her dream, except there I had been in the hallway of the old apartment back in Brooklyn, where dust rose in swirls and where giant and bright green caterpillars, half movie monster, half Crayola drawing made flesh, chattered on the walls.

I cried and cried when she found me, and just squeezed shut my eyes when she said she was reminded of her dream. That's when I started drinking. Beers mostly, but whatever I could get my hands on.

One time, my father, the bastard, three thousand miles away with his new kids and new wife in California, had a dream about me, too. I woke up with bruises, little purple thumbprints, all over my arms. A red streak around my neck, like the spoor of fishing wire. I called him and left a message asking if he had had a bad dream. Angela, his new wife, called back and left a message, screaming like a dumb bitch about how she didn't like me calling her house and disrupting her day. Just write a thank you letter when you get a check next time! Then you can ask your father questions! She sounded far away and hollow,



Illustration by Tina Contes

like she was recording the message while in a stall in the lady's room at Macy's, like an angry ghost.

I tried to stay awake while my parents slept, which was tricky with the time zones, and it didn't work anyway. My mother dreamed of me again, a head atop a silhouette of fog, nothing but a single artery winding out of the bottom of my neck to the red heart hanging in the mist. My limbs went numb right in the living room; I wanted to call for mama, to wake her up, but there were no lungs in my air. I couldn't even think. I just floated above the couch, the sound of the TV a tinny scratch, the bit of cake in my mouth swallowed then falling into the breeze at the end of my throat. When the dream shifted away from me, when I was able to blink and see and understand myself again, I stood up and looked at the couch cushions. Nothing. The smear of chocolate and saliva was on the seat of my pants, like I had sat on it.

Some people, few of us, are born sensitive. Not just our brains or minds, or whatever, but every molecule. Remember Madison Huffington? She was in that movie about the prom, and then she had the song, a one-hitwonder type of thing, "I Love You Like Cherry Cola"? The blond with the bangs, she stayed up all night drinking and drugging and getting her ass in the newspapers, even after her star had begun to fall after her second movie, the remake of Pretty In Pink, flopped. And then she turned up dead, and the cops thought it was a gang rape. It wasn't.

She had the same problem I did, but she was famous, and lots of guys like to jerk off before going to sleep. It had to wear her down, being fucked a dozen times a night, or kissing some high school nerd after a kickball game, or shopping with some fat fan girl in a mall that slowly morphs into a minotaur's labyrinth, Remember that time she woke up in the parking lot in Sherman Oaks, supposedly after a coke binge? Yeah, you don't sleep off a coke binge, you just buy more coke.

Even I dreamed about Madison Huffington, and in the dream she told me she was a sensitive, and that if only she'd known she never would have started auditioning or taking singing lessons. She just wanted to be left alone and work in a Dairy Queen like I did. We drank tequila shots and then she tried to kiss me. I woke up drunk and hot. I know she did too. But she couldn't get herself out of the papers, not even when, hell, especially not after she started showing up on the red carpets bombed out of her mind, the straps of her party dress slipping off her shoulder to show her tits, the stumbling, the black eyes, and spontaneous choking, like some asshole was gagging her with his dick. Gang raped to death in a locked room in a locked apartment in a doorman building on the Upper West Side, no DNA evidence, no footage from the security cameras, and her German Shepherd Tonto was found unharmed, hungry, and whimpering at her side, on the bed. Sure, happens all the time, in crappy paperback novels.

I was no Madison Huffington. I wore shapeless sweatshirts, Kurt Cobain T-shirts, and hoodies, all the time. I didn't wear make-up, no matter how much my mother buys for me, or nagged me about it. I combed my hair, kept clean, that was it. Guys pretty much made those dump-truck-backing-up beep beep noises at me, or ignored me, or flicked rubber bands at me in class. And any way they hated me was fine with me, fucking assholes. I know what they do when they like you, and I'd rather they didn't.

But I met a guy anyway, outside the 7-11, one of my infamous beer runs. Even an ugly girl with boat hips can get some older guy to buy her a beer, if she has the money, and mostly they don't stay to split the six-pack with you, but Ronald was different. He went to Kennedy, with me. a senior when I was a freshman, and he was really tall and had a neatly trimmed beard and no acne and a fake ID, so he could buy booze with impunity. He was one of those trenchcoat mafia types, with the stupid long duster and biker boots, even though he just drove a Hyundai. He liked metal, and not the "nu metal" crap, but the hard stuff, and read Crowley and Robert Anton Wilson and promised he'd never vote because the government was just something that the corporations propped up for you to blame and his room was actually the whole basement of his parents' place, with a private entrance and his own bathroom so we hooked up. Ronald said he saw something in my soul, and that he liked that I wasn't freaked out by him, even though it was pretty clear that he liked freaking people out.

I'd go by his place most days, while his folks were at work, and we'd watch DVDs (Star Trek, some Italian zombie flicks he liked, Mexican wrestling, all sorts of crazy movies) and we'd drink Pabst till his tongue didn't taste like an ashtray anymore and I'd give him a hand job or something and that would be it. He helped me with some English assignments. He read a lot, Shakespeare and Yeats and everything. I was able to relax. Our relationship was clinical and matter-of-fact and sometimes he'd smile at me, warm and organically, when I said something he thought was funny or hadn't thought of first.

Two weeks later I woke up in the middle of the night, squirming on my belly, nose compressed to my face by Saran Wrap being held tightly over my face, my wrists behind my back tied in barbed wire and a huge, full, pain up my ass. Fuckin' bastard. I bled, and had to use a tampon up there because I was too embarrassed to ask Mom to take me to a doctor or even say anything. The plastic and barbed wire vanished soon enough, like the taste of something on your tongue in a dream right after waking up, but the tear in my ass lasted a good long while.

I went to Ronald's place anyway after school, because I didn't have much else to do, and told him I guessed what he had been dreaming about. He was amazed, half-skeptical, half-thrilled that we had a real psychic connection. He sat

on his couch, hunched over, arms and fingers flailing like an autist, gibbering at me: Are you sure, Liz, I didn't tell you about that fantasy? Were you here last night, listening to me talking in my sleep? Was that in a movie we both saw? Wait, are there marks on your wrists still? Are you okay? Maybe we both just dreamed it? Maybe I didn't dream it at all, but I subconsciously want to please and validate you and just whipped up the memory that I did, you know? Why are you crying again? Does it still hurt? Do you want to drink? Should I apologize? I'd never really hurt you; I believe in the slogan "Safe, Sane, and Consensual," you know? Are you kinky like that?

I stood up and leaned against one the pillars that held up the low ceiling because it hurt to sit. I'm sure. No, of course not. No. They're fading, but you can still see a little indentation. I don't bet you want to peer up my butt. And maybe I'm subconsciously fingering my own asshole to make it hurt? Fuck you, fuck you, how can you even ask that. Yes. Yes. Yes. I know. I don't know; I don't want to talk about that. Don't be a fucking asshole. God, Ron, I need help!

So he decided to help, with an experiment. He gave me a video camera and said he would hypnotize himself to dream about me in a certain way he'd write down and seal in an envelope. I'd take the camera home, set up to record all night, one second for every minute that passed, and we'd see if anything happened. And he wouldn't tell me what he'd dream about, in case that would affect what I'd do in my sleep. I told him to dream of something impossible. And sweet, And that night he did.

We watched the tape the next day, and we both knew what would be on it. Me, staring at the camera in a pale green light, my eyes searing starry points, then finally, even nervous and chewing my nails and twirling and tugging on my hair and not even trying to look nonchalant or cool, I fell asleep. Things happened quickly; we missed a lot of what was going on because of all the jump cuts and unrecorded time. I was floating over the bed, my head twisted around on my neck like in The Exorcist. My mouth open, vomiting rose petals onto my pillow. My sweatshirt gone, I was naked, thinner, no belly rolls, no lumpy square ass, no tits sagging into my armpits. My mouth open again, flame poured out of it and took the shape of a phoenix. Still levitating, by vertical now, my toes pointed and arms wide like I was crucified. smiling, like I hadn't in years. I was aglow, fiery, like the phoenix, my hair spread out like I was floating in the pool. I looked beautiful. Finally, someone had had a nice dream about me.

Tattoos, glowing again, like my eyes did, like my skin had, weird tribal designs, shifting over my body. They looked like the doodles Ronald had sketched out and shoved into the envelope. Then my whole body faded, leaving a glassy outline, and where my flesh was now we saw an infinity of pinpoint stars. I gasped, in joy. Ron cringed and said he got the image from an old screensaver

his computer used to have. So fucking stupid, even that moment of ecstasy had to be stained.

I ran out the door and up the dirty steps, crying. I sniffled and stood with my arms folded, waiting for the dumb fucking suburban bus that came around only once an hour. Ron showed up in his car and offered me a ride home and said he was sorry again but I told him to fuck himself up the fucking ass and that he was a creep and that he shouldn't be fucking around with freshmen and that I bet he'd still be in that gross basement when he was thirty.

And he told me that he could dream about me whenever he wanted me. I stopped breathing, like that time when I was just a patch of gray fog, but I got back in his fucking car and stared at my hands when he kissed my cheek and just said yes or no when he asked me anything directly, like if I wanted to try tequila that night, and I didn't swallow when I blew him that night, but let his come spill all over his white, hairy, belly. He didn't look very happy either. Maybe he, too, just wanted things the way they were before, when we actually were nice and dishonest with each other.

Ronald bragged about how his studies of the occult and esoteric philosophy gave him the ability to write his own dreams and all the willpower he needed to turn me into a perfect little slave. He was just waiting for his grandfather to die and then with his inheritance he'd buy a house out in the woods and we'd live together and be happy. And I'd learn to be happy. He'd dream me happy. He'd dream himself happy too, because being a mystic is a terrible burden, like in *Hellblazer*. He drank a lot of the tequila and passed out on the couch while *Santo Contra El Cerebro Diabolico* gibbered away in Spanish on his shitty little TV. I snagged his book on lucid dreaming, let myself out, waited for the bus for another fucking hour in the freezing cold and went home and dreamed of him.

I guessed right; Ron knew all about this shit because he was a sensitive too. When the firemen found him, his arms and legs were so badly burned that they had melted into the black frame of his couch. Electrical fire, they decided, because he has his TV and DVD player and computer and stereo and that stupid ball with the lightning in it and Christmas lights and all his other shit jammed into one pair of outlets, but the cops interviewed me anyway because it seemed at first like the fire had started on the couch, not in any of the wires.

And I'd really fucked up because I got on the news and in the paper as the quiet, ugly girl who was dating the Creepy Occult Guy who died in a mysterious fire. My pussy bled absinthe at night. I'd wake up in the woods beyond the state university campus, where a big boulder in a clearing had impressed some fucking sophomore from the Dungeons and Dragons club once. Every pseudogothic jackoff in the state made me their goddess or their whore. All my teeth fell out, and grew tiny cartoon mouths of their own and laughed at me, but they were back in my

mouth every morning. My own dreams were fucked up too; chainsaw and hooks on chains descending from the sky, the atmosphere turning to glass, old men in cheesy plaid pants, with long plaid tubes holding their hose dicks like they had three legs, chasing me. Ron was in all the dreams, being tortured in the background. I could breathe underwater, but was trapped in an aquarium in a lab; scientists threw McDonald's burgers into the water for my feeding time. I woke up soaked and sick to my stomach from the heavy grease.

I got pregnant three times and had three abortions in two months. Once I had to find a nurse and pay her extra, out of my summer job money, to make sure I could get the procedure even though it was against the rules to have them so soon after one another like that. I hadn't had sex, except for oral, and that only with Ronald.

One night I awoke with a thump. I'd been smashed up against the ceiling, licking the paint, and was slammed down to the ground. I groaned, but I wasn't the only one making noise. Someone was throwing pebbles at my window. I looked out the window, feeling totally calm and safe, the way you probably do in your dreams, and saw my father standing in the little spotlights at the head of the driveway.

I was two stories up and a little far away, but it was one of those silent Jersey nights. Too cold for crickets and too late for traffic. I heard him just fine. Liz, he told me, if you can receive, you can transmit. I didn't understand. Madison Huffington, looking shiny like she did in the movies, not bloated and gray like she did on www.sexyautopsies.com when I last saw her, stepped into the pool of light and told me the same thing. Sensitivity works both ways. Don't dream it, be it. In horror movies, when you see someone standing in the foggy dark, then look away, then look back, they aren't there anymore. I looked away, biting my lip, and then looked back hoping they'd be gone and that I'd just wake up again, in some other foul dream, but they were still on my lawn, waiting for a response. And Ronald, a head taller than my Dad and looking like a creature from one of his movies, his arms and half his face black and wrinkled, stood with them now.

You guessed wrong, he told me, his voice a harsh, crackling, whisper, like someone whose every inhalation was an asthma attack. I wasn't a sensitive. I didn't know shit about what I was doing. You killed me because you could, not because I was any more vulnerable than anyone else. Liz, I'm sorry. Then they, all three of them, disappeared.

That morning I didn't have to tell my mother that I wanted to go away for a while. She didn't believe any of the bullshit, and choked all the sleeping and thrashing and injuries up to drugs, so I was off to Vermont to some rehab place-slash-mental hospital. In Vermont, everyone wore hoodies and looked down at the ground, because it was always so icy on the streets. None of the clients had

the big winter boots you needed to walk around here; we were all just a bunch of dirtbags from different sunnier suburbs, in Hatebreed t-shirts and too much eye makeup. Everyone here just dreamed about getting high in some convenience store parking lot while "Sweet Emotion" played on the radio. My mother repressed me enough that I never appeared in her dreams, at least not as myself. My father, his visitation aside, was happy to get rid of me once and for all; my being shipped off was just what he needed to forget about me without even a pang of guilt. I could sleep peacefully again. I could, but I didn't.

During the day I played Little Miss Perfect. I went to the on-site school and paid attention, bringing my grades up from 70s to low-90s, except for math but even there I was getting in the 80s. I did all the artsy-craftsy bullshit and didn't put skulls or mutants in my drawings or demand black wool to knit with. When I wrote poems for class, they were about trees and how slick the Connecticut River looks when it froze over, not about death or depression. During group sessions I hugged the girl next to me whenever she started crying, even though she was a pretentious hippy who smelled like a landfill. And, just to throw off any suspicion, I fucked up occasionally. I snuck cigarettes and occasionally pushed away my dinner, as if I were cultivating an eating disorder. It worked; I got library access and was allowed to go into town, which, this being Vermont, had all sorts of hippy-dippy New Age shops, with occult sections.

I looked for copies of Ron's old books. The neurolinguistic programming stuff, lucid dreaming material, Golden Dawn, esoteric Buddhism, self-hypnosis. If it had a cool cover – no comic book witches and silvery moons, I mean the heavy shit — I snapped it up. And I paced myself; I couldn't read everything at once and I couldn't risk to get impatient. I started meditating, both because the books said to and because it helped calm me down enough to carry on the charade and grasp the material. I started to get it. I even started to dream about the veves and sigils and the Sanskirt and Kanji letters sprinkled throughout the texts.

The rehab center was nominally Christian so I kept the books hidden under another girl's bed, and I changed which bed every week or so, keeping ahead of the spot inspections, which were supposed to be random, but actually just went Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday and Thursday, then Tuesday across the month. Nobody wanted to deal with us on Monday after a nice weekend or stay late to fill out paperwork on Friday. I told my counselors I had taken up prayer, and the liked the show of me sitting, in a half-lotus, eyes closed, murmuring to myself.

It was February by the time I had mastered my dreams. I did little things at first; Weepy Wendy, who I didn't like at all, woke up one morning to discover that her track marks were gone. Yeah, I did a nice thing for a dumb bitch I loathed. I couldn't afford to be dragged down into

the world of attachment and emotion. Wendy went home soon after, and lots of the other girl's started instantly getting over their problems, at least temporarily. With luck the little bit of breathing room I bought them was enough for them not to be sucked back in to the druggie lifestyle after they found themselves back in Cleveland or Worchester, Mass or wherever. The dorm was emptying out; I felt good about that. Resolution leading to emptiness. The first time I experienced Kensho, neither of my two remaining suitemates, both newbies and both totally wired, had even noticed.

The second time I disappeared in my sleep, an insomniac counselor did notice and by the time I returned to my temporal-spatial-conscious self, all the lights were on, walkie-talkies were crackling on the quad, and the red and white lights of a cop car painted the night outside my barred window. I made up some bullshit about falling asleep on the toilet, but got in trouble anyway. They sent me out to rake long dead leaves in the patch of woods behind the main building, and that slow, mindless work, out in the harmony of nature, was just what I needed.

I had begun to crave the dream, to be conscious of my Oneness with the universe, and that is a false path, one that would have left me stuck here in the quagmire of matter. I admit that when I first began my studies I was out for revenge. I wanted to dream a doom on to my parents and on to every asshole who ever used me as a bedtime stroke. But out there in the woods, dragging a rake through acorns and slush and mats of mournful black leaves, I achieved true enlightenment. There will be no revenge. I won't wreak havoc. All I am going to do is dream a little dream. All of us, for we are all one anyway, at once, realizing that we're just pools of infinite space bound by glassy borders. I'll dream a little dream of you, and of you, and of me, opening ourselves wide to embrace the nothingness. Like what's in the little animal footprints in the patches of snow.

Ah, stupid fucking Ronald. What did we do to one another? Breathe in, breathe out. Rake leaves.

No stress, no lusts, no hungers, no trials, no anxieties, no grief or pain. A world where we're dead leaves on the damp earth, from which wondrous new life can soar and reach the heavens made green from spring blooms. The experience of Nirvana, once and for all, all and at once. Slip under the shade of the upturned roots of a fallen tree, sit, and rest.

Dream, dream, dream.

Just.

Like.

This.

52 BRUTARIAN 48/49

THE BRAINS UNRIAL

By Stephen Dedman

"True! - Nervous - Very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?"

The woman in the chair – psychiatrist, counsellor, therapist, interrogator, inquisitor, hallucination, whatever – looks blankly at me. "Poe," I explain. No response. Maybe she thinks I mean the Teletubby. "The Tell-Tale Heart.'

A flicker. "Why do you use other people's words when you talk about yourself?"

"If I made up my own words, you'd think I was crazy."

She doesn't laugh.

"There are no books in here, so all I can do is remember stories I've read, repeat them to myself, like someone out of *Fahrenheit 451*. I'm starting to feel like... what's that Marquez story about the guy who decides he's going to write Don Quixote from scratch, without having read the original?"

She writes something in her notebook, but doesn't answer.

"Of course, in the story, he manages to make it wordperfect: in fact, the critics rave about it, say it has levels of meaning that Cervantes didn't manage. But that's just a story. The only version of Don Quixote I know that was written like that is pretty fucking spectacular, because it was illustrated by hand... no, that's not the right word... it's illuminated, like one of those medieval manuscripts. You can see it in the Collection de l'Art Brut."

She raises an eyebrow at that. Maybe it was my accent. "What's that? Or where?"

"Lausanne. Switzerland. It's a gallery for art created by psychiatric patients. It translates literally as 'Raw Art', but in English it's usually called Outsider art, which I always thought was a bit perverse, because the people who did it were Inside: schizophrenics, bipolars, psychotics. Maybe I should send them something when I get back Outside."

"Have you been there?"

"When I was a kid. It's near the headquarters of the Olympics committee. Now that's a fucking scary building. Looks like it was designed by Albert Speer – you know, Hitler's architect. I went to the Collection to get away from it. There's some scary stuff in there, too, but on the whole, it's actually quite wonderful."

"Do you feel at home there?"

"More than I do here, that's for fucking sure," I say, looking around her office. It can't be her real office; unless she's bureaucrat Barbie, born in a box, she must have a place somewhere with her certificates on the wall, photos on the desk, books on the shelves, Far Side cartoons on the calendar. This box is as bare of personal touches as the inside of a pill bottle with the label removed. The whole fucking place is like that.

"What about your real home?"

"It's my parents' home, not mine. I'm not saying that they're not my parents. I don't have, what do they call it, Kapsbrak, no, that's that kid out of the Stephen King novel, the one who, uh... Capgras syndrome. That's it."

"Capgras syndrome?"

"Thinking that people around you have been replaced

by doubles. Like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. I read about it in *Scientific American*. Or Tourette's Syndrome. I just swear sometimes when I'm upset. Fuck, all teenagers swear. Sometimes I lose control of it, but Jesus, they're just fucking *words*!"

"But you do get depressed."

"Fuck, yes! Doesn't everyone?"

"You get depressed a lot."

"Maybe."

"And you write when you're supposed to be studying. They caught you writing a poem during your biology exam. But you won't take medication."

"The fucking pills stop me writing." She doesn't say that that's the point, but I can tell she's thinking it. "You didn't answer my question," I remind her. "Why can't I have some fucking books?"

"We can't provide books for everybody, and the ones you've chosen aren't going to help cure your depression. Other patients might find them even more disturbing. Anyway, there are magazines—"

"Doctor's waiting room magazines. Sometimes I think they're a major cause of illness."

"- and the TV..."

I snort. "Reality TV. If people want to see reality, why don't they look out a fucking window? Why don't you feed your closed circuit cameras here into everybody's TV instead, and let them vote us the fuck out of here?"

* * *

"It could be worse," J whispers, as we sit at the farthest corner of the room from the TV, bent over a chess board. Big Brother may be watching us, but he's not a good listener. J has her eyes half-closed and is touching her eyelids lightly to make a kaleidoscope. She says she read that Dali said he'd do that if they tried to stop him painting.

"How?"

"We might not be white. Crazy people who don't look white get shipped overseas. Don't you watch the news?"

"Not any more. They say it makes me depressed." It's just like reality TV, except that we don't get as many chances to vote people out. "Did you try asking for some books?"

"Yes, but I thought I'd better make up my own list. They'd get suspicious if I gave them yours."

"Why?"

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest? Catch-22? Nineteen Eighty-Four? Don Quixote? The Outsider? Ann Frank? Sylvia Plath?"

"They're all on the school's recommended reading list," I say, and cringe at how defensive I sound. "Okay, can you ask them for *La Passe-Muraille*?"

"They know I don't speak French. What is it?"

"It's about someone who can walk through walls. I suppose they might think that was escapist."

J looks around at the walls and up at the ceiling. They could also pass for white, at least in bright sunlight,

but in this weather they're the same dull grey as the boiled potatoes we had for dinner. J, I know, sees them as a blank canvas, as she does most walls. That's sort of why she's in there, for painting graffiti. When they took her paints away, she went back to drawing on paper, but that seemed too flimsy, too temporary, so she started turning herself into a work of art instead, using her skin as a canvas. They tried taking her inks away from her, but she managed to find needles and razor blades, and when they tried taking those, she used fire. It sounds as though her parents weren't so distressed by the methods she was using for decorating her body as they were by the way she was exhibiting her work, but maybe that's just the way she tells the story.

She took her medication for a while, and was briefly fascinated that it turned her urine purple. The staff thought she was hallucinating, but the doctor said it was a common side-effect. After that, she grew bored with it. She asks me to tell her again about the art galleries I visited when I was in Europe. I do my best to describe what I saw in Paris and Milan and London, the d'Orsay and Brera and V&A, but as always we ended up back at the Collection de l'Art Brut. This time I tell her about Henry Darger, whose work I first saw in a room there. Darger was sent to an orphanage at eight, diagnosed as an habitual trouble-maker, and kept in various mental institutions until he escaped when he was sixteen. He spent most of the next sixty-four years cleaning hospitals, attending mass daily, conversing with the voices in his head, and writing. He started writing his autobiography until it turned into a story of a tornado named Sweetie Pie on page 207 and continued in that vein for the next four thousand or so pages, but he's best known for his 15,000 page epic titled "The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion." The Vivian Girls were traced from pictures scavenged from Chicago's rubbish bins, and the manuscript is illustrated - no, illuminated - with hundreds of paintings and sketches and collages, some of them three metres wide. Darger was better at drawing incredibly realistic clouds and brilliantlycolored landscapes than he was at the female form, but he did draw the girls' penises himself. The work remained his secret until it was discovered by his landlord after his death. Darger's death, that is, not the landlord's.

"Hundreds..." J breathes.

I nod. "And 15,000 single-spaced pages. But over sixty-four years, that's not even a page a day. I'm doing better than that now. Most days, anyway."

"Why do you feel the need to write so much?" the interrogator asks.

It's a wet day, as grey outside as it is inside, one of those times when I think we might be better off if no one had ever invented windows; I feel cold even though I know that it really isn't. The room's empty bookshelves remind me of a skeleton, a rib-cage. When I was dissecting a rat in biology class, they accidentally gave me one that had been pithed, its brain burnt out by an electric current. I opened the skull only to find it empty. I shrug. "Why do people write?" I ask. "Something to do? A way of being somewhere else? A way of making sense of the world?"

"Do you feel happier when you're writing?"

"Happier's not the right word."

"Your work seems rather bleak. Do you think that's healthy?"

"I don't know. Is lying healthier than telling the truth?"

"You think this is the truth?"

"It's my truth."

She nods at that. "Do you want to be somewhere else?"

"Fuck yes!"

"Where?"

I look at her suspiciously. "If you're thinking of sending me overseas, my ancestors came from Europe. Bin gar keine Russin, staumm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch."

"I know about your background," she says with a good imitation of patience. "I'm just reminding you that if you take your medication, and we observe a positive change, you'll be free to leave."

"You'll see a positive change if I can get out of here,

but I can't imagine it happening before then."

"You were depressed before you came here."

I shrug.

"Why won't you take the medication?"

"It makes me feel slow and stupid, and that's about all I can fucking feel when I take it! It stops me writing! There has to be something better than the fucking pills!"

"Not yet," she says, and for a moment I look at her face and it's like an epiphany, like looking at one of those trick pictures where you suddenly see a beautiful woman's profile so clearly that you can never look at this again and not see it, never see only what you saw before... I realize that she does understand. Worse still, she believes what she's saying. She might even be right.

Maybe the writing isn't about being somewhere else. Maybe it's about being someone else. No, that can't be right. I don't want to be someone else. I don't.

* * *

J and I sit on her bed and stare through the window at the clouds, then turn to face the wall. We've decided that if we work together, we can do something worthy of being hung in the Collection de L'art Brut. "Are you ready?" I ask.

She nods, and holding hands, we walk through the wall.

END



SERIAL

His face was like a Boticelli,
Made up of honey dust and snake oil.
When I kissed him I tasted the sea
That threatens the 7 year old inside of me-

He didn't rattle on
Like the weak jazz in hotel bars,
Was not sweet or gentle,
But raw, with damp wings
Ready to unfold.

A wolf, Starved for tenderness And consummation.

LIKE EVE

Someone was whispering Sweetheart, Cupid is dead And we killed him.

I was asking
How do you kiss
And taste? Where
Does your mind wander
When you're touching yourself.
Your lover?
And do you dream of wicked things?

Hove Jesus, immortal

And chaste, and although
I am like Eve
In the blood ritual
And constant temptation
I would rather be
Your very own
Breathless whore.

Mr. Benders' New House

By Jeff Somers

WE KNEW the old green house on the northeast corner of the intersection as the Gooly House, because in the dim recesses of our young minds we all knew that Mrs. Gooly, whom we had feared and hated, had lived there for some years, keeping our errant tennis balls, frisbees, and gliders, a reign of tyranny over our childhoods. We'd hated Mrs. Gooly because she insisted we stay outside her low, crumbling stone fence, because she wouldn't let us reclaim our lost toys, because she snitched to our parents whenever we did anything in her sight, because she smelled slightly of dust at all times. We called her Mrs. Gooly, not very original, but appropriate enough, and fought the urge to run past her house, forcing ourselves to walk sedately. untroubled by an obvious witch in our midst.

The house was mysterious. Three floors, with wickedly peaked roofs, and a dark, mulchy green. The windows were always shuttered, giving it a blind, moon-faced appearance. The yard surrounded it like a moat, a continuous band of green, overgrown to the extreme with odd plants we didn't see in any other yard, a narrow path of slate leading from the

slumped gate to the front door. The stone fence was only about three feet high, and was of a chalky substance we weren't sure was really stone. It could be vaulted with one well-timed jump, unless you were Clarence from four doors down who was fat and always split his pants. We were terrified of the Gooly House, and of Mrs. Gooly, and we were shocked, and distrustful, when informed that she had passed away.

For weeks we feared ghosts. The house looked exactly the same: shuttered, moldy, brooding. Mrs. Gooly, being the undead, had no family that anyone knew of, so her spirit was free, we were convinced, to roam the house as she had in life, except, certainly, with new untold powers of evil. We crept past it, an eye out for black magic, and didn't find out that someone had bought the house until the daring daylight raid we planned, almost a year after Mrs. Gooly's demise.

A year is a long time in childhood. A whole slate of holidays had come and gone, a whole school year. Mrs. Gooly faded into the past, and if we still moved more quickly when passing her looming green house, we didn't do it consciously any more. As she faded

from fearsome witch to crabby old lady who used to live there, the neighborhood kids began more and more to look longingly toward the uncharted reaches of the Gooly House, where years' worth of sporting goods lay waiting in the dim recesses of the tall grass, on the slightly slanted roof and in the gutters. Even after a year it took some weeks for us to come up with the combined courage to plan and execute a raid on the Gooly house.

There were five of us in charge. Myself, so pale I was almost invisible, and thin and known as the fastest runner on the block, a boy who fought back challengers every week, defeating kids from whole other neighborhoods in races; there was Rapheal, Rafe, who was my polar opposite: deeply tan, with dark hair and a muscular build, even at that age, that I envied: Marcia, who would, three years later, be my first kiss, but who was then just a freckled. red-haired, skinny girl who sometimes punched us in the shoulders for no reason; Lewis, deceptively nerdy in his thick, taped-up glasses; and Tanya, bossy, always bruised, who stole from us whenever we accidentally let her into our houses. Over grape sodas and Flav-or-Ice, we began by idly discussing how many balls we had lost at the Gooly house. and slowly devised a plan that we figured would net thousands of dollars in rubber and plastic. What we planned to do with all those toys, I couldn't say. It was just a challenge.

The details of the plan were as follows:

The raid would be conducted during daylight, because even if we were bigger kids than ever, there was no way we were going into the Gooly house in the dark: I would challenge you today to do so, and you'd make up some excuse. We would enter the Gooly house perimeter from Webster Street through the King's yard. The Kings were tolerant of us using their vard as a shortcut through the neighborhood, and this would allow us to enter the Gooly house perimeter without being observed by any stray parents who might have wandered from the house. Our parents never left the house during the day on a weekend, we knew that, although we couldn't figure out why. Dads stayed in their easy chairs watching sports, Moms did whatever Moms did, mysterious things we didn't want any part of. While unlikely that any of them would be seen on the streets, we didn't want to take chances. Finally, we would start on the roof, beginning with the most dangerous and vulnerable area and working our way downward into the concealing safety of the tall grass, the myserious, lush jungle of the untended vard.

We crashed over the Kings' fence boldly, trying to impress whatever ghosts there might be with our lack of fear. The house loomed before us as it always had - forbidding, not so much dark as a lack of light in the shape of a house - only closer. The siding was water-damaged, and we discovered to our mild surprise that part of the deep green color of the house was a thriving ivy plant that was consuming it, slowly. I remember we stood there, staring at it, for a few seconds, and then Marcia snorted in derision at men in general and began hoisting her slim frame up the side of the house. which was actually pretty easy; the small shed outside the back door gave easy purchase for the porch window sill, which was a quick lunge away from the porch roof, which was in turn just a few seconds of huffing and puffing from the second story roof, which, we theorized, was the pot of gold. And then, unexpected, an adult voice.

"What the hell are you kids doing back here?"

We didn't know his name then, but Mr. Benders was standing in the dark rectangle of the porch door. He was Our Parents' Age, which was the only other age we knew aside from Our Age and Younger Than Us. He was balding and paunchy, wearing ridiculously baggy shorts and a bright shirt with a floral pattern. Holding a beer in one hand, he was dirty, with dark smudges on his face.

We froze, stupefied by the one variable we hadn't considered: someone was actually living in the Gooly House. It stunned us. Who would live here? It was inconceivable!

Marcia slipped and grunted, and Mr. Benders glanced up sharply. "Is someone on the roof, for crying out loud?"

Regaining her feminine grace, Marcia dropped lightly to the ground directly in front of Mr. Benders, and they faced each other through the screen door for a few moments, Benders with beer in hand, Marcia with one hand on a cocked hip, like she owned the place.

Benders looked over her shoulder. "You kids got parents?"

We began making our retreat, mumbling vague apologies and making our way through the messy yard. Mr. Benders watched us go, and then disappeared inside the house. He was the topic of hot conversation for the rest of the day, and we actually pumped our parents for information, slyly, in roundabout ways they wouldn't be able to decipher. All we learned was that Mr. Benders had nothing to do with Mrs. Gooly: he had simply bought the house and moved into the neighborhood. Instantly, our feelings for Mr. Benders turned sympathetic, because he obviously didn't know that the house was haunted. On the phone that evening, Marcia and I solemnly decided that it was too late to save him; Mrs. Gooly would likely murder him in his sleep that very night. This also meant we could return for the lost Super Pinkies shortly.

Summer back then was a real Time, an actual period in our lives. We recalled, dimly, Summers past. We looked forward to, brightly, Summers to come. There was School, and there were Holidays. And there was Summer. Today, of course, things have been diced much finer as we've aged: we don't even have Days any more, we have Hours. Rush Hour. Lunch Hour. Happy Hour. But during the Benders Incident, as we always called it, we still had Summers, endless tracts of fertile time in which to explore, and make up games, eat junk food, and nap.

The day after our bold but failed daylight raid, we all woke up, as usual, watched cartoons, as usual, ate cereal, as usual, and emerged into the hot street to being wasting the day, as usual. There we all stopped, because up the hill, outside the Gooly House, something unexpected had happened at some point. While we'd been sleeping, or eating, or watching, Mr. Benders had begun cleaning out the house, and there was a large collection of stuff out on the sidewalk for the garbage, beckoning us with subtle glints in the sunlight and mysterious shadows.

Rafe and Lewis were standing on the opposite corner, drinking Cokes.

"Hey, Ramis," Rafe said with his light accent, "Can you believe all that crap?"

"That guy's gonna be doing this for weeks, man," Lewis confirmed.

We crossed the street and arrived at the growing collection of stuff just as Mr. Benders appeared, hauling a large black trunk down the front stairs.

We watched him, amazed. The Gooly House's secrets were being spilled out onto the street. Who knew what kind of arcana Mrs. Gooly had collected in her hundreds of years living there, hunting the children of the neighborhood, poisoning our drinking water, flying through the night on her broom, stealing our prized possessions. Mr. Benders was struggling with the trunk as if it weighed a lot, and Rafe nudged me out of my fantasies.

"How much you wanna bet the old bat's in that trunk?"

A chill ran through me. We watched Mr. Benders huff and puff the trunk down onto the sidewalk, then pause to pull a rag from his back pocket and wipe sweat from his brow. With a slight start, he noticed us.

"Great, it's the goddamn Little Rascals again. Your parents just let you run wild around here?"

"Sure," Rafe said, always an instigator, "why not?"

Mr. Benders shook his head, and bent down to grasp the trunk by its cracked leather handle.

"Hey, Mister," I said, "you mind if we look through all this stuff?"

Mr. Benders paused, breathing hard, bent at the waist. "Knock yourself out, kid. But don't make a mess. Whoever lived here before left three houses worth of stuff the goddamn Realtor couldn't be bothered to clean out, and I don't want to have to clean it up twice, got it?"

I nodded. It would be some time before we realized that Mr. Benders' favorite word was 'goddamn'.

We regarded the epic pile of trash professionally, although most of it wasn't immediately familiar to us. There were boxes, moldy and unlabelled. There were two huge, beaten leather chairs that had backs like wings arching out over you, which we all probably considered sitting in but were too scared: they didn't look like chairs made for humans, but rather like chairs made for vampires, or demons. While Mr. Benders loudly grunted and panted behind us, struggling with the trunk, we gingerly picked over the junk, looking for anything we could make sense of.

"Hey, Mister," Lewis suddenly said, making us turn, "what's in the trunk?"

Mr. Benders, standing beside the trunk like a winded Great White Hunter, shrugged. "Who cares? The old bat who lived here kept everything. Wouldn't be surprised if it was full of goddamned bottlecaps."

Bottlecaps piqued mild interest, as we played Bottlecaps now and again on chalked boards in the street. While we wouldn't use that many bottlecaps in our whole lives, there might, we all suspected, be some real humdingers in there, unusual caps that would prove to be the secret ingredient to a championship season.

"Can we open it?"

Mr. Benders glanced down at the trunk and toed it with his sneaker. "Kid, if you can get it open, be my guest."

With that he wiped sweat from his face and walked back into the Gooly House. We waited until the door had shut behind him, swallowing him back into the Gooly universe that was humming inside it like greased, blackened machinary whose use had been forgotten, and then we swarmed over the junk.

We left the trunk for last, for when the girls showed up, because we figured it would be the big discovery of the day and knew we'd be in trouble if we tried to hoard it for ourselves. The pile offered plenty of junk, anyway; aside from old lady clothes and a collection of strange, heavy records that seemed to be made of stone, there were three objects that captured the rest of our

day's attention, and solidified Mrs. Gooly's legacy as a witch of some sort.

First, there was the Box with the crank. It was black, cracked everywhere like old skin, and had no lid or hinges we could detect. It did, however, have a worn wooden crank that reached out of it like a twisted arm. Lewis cranked it once or twice, and it produced an ominous ticking noise from within—whether this meant it was broken or if this meant it was winding up for something, we didn't know, and I wasn't sure I wanted to know; the ticking made my back tighten up in anxiety. We shook it, but nothing rattled inside. We turned it over and over in our hands and could see no possible way inside.

Underneath a pile of chemical-smelling dresses - nothing we had ever seen Mrs. Gooly wearing - we found a jewelry box full of photographs. We were at first not interested, expecting just the usual photos: pictures of Mrs. Gooly in happier times, looking much like our own grandmothers in their own stiff, fading pictures. A closer look, however, revealed that the photos were neither of Mrs. Gooly, nor very ordinary. They appeared to all have been taken at the same time, in the same place, but we couldn't be sure; they were all confused, blurred images, with shapes that might have been people, or furniture. In some of the photos there was a perceived violence, a horror of motion that we couldn't seem to look away from. In others. there didn't seem to be anything - just blurry shots of an empty room, beaten wood floors, pale plaster walls.

We sat on the curb and went through the photos one at a time, carefully, passing them down the line and staring at them. I felt as if there was something in those photos, a puzzle, and if I had enough time to stare at them, I might piece them together. In one, a man wearing baggy dress pants, a short, thick tie from black and white movies, and a towering pile of curly dark hair seems to float above a group of seated people. Their blurred faces appear to be raised in awe, or panic, arms half raised as well in a desperate attempt to fend something off, or block their sight, or maybe in hysteria.

The girls, fresh from mysterious girl business somewhere, arrived in time for the third discovery: an ominous book written entirely in runes. The dark green leather of the book was cracked but somehow velvety, and gave me goosebumps to touch. The paper bound within was smooth and felt wet to my fingers, as if it were leaving some oily residue behind. We all stood around wiping our hands on our pants and shirts after touching it. The runes were inscrutable, darkly printed, stark against the yellowed white of the paper. Each page was a solid block of symbols, with no paragraphs, punctuation,

or illustration. They began neatly on the first page, and ended abruptly on the last unnumbered sheet. The smell of the book was one of neglect and time and something that scratched our throats and made us cough.

The girls were excited by the book. Declaring it a witch's spellbook, they claimed only girls could handle it and clutched it between them possessively. Honestly, I recall being very glad to let them have it, but Rafe had to make a stand and threatened them with the usual if they kept it for themselves: torment, vandalism, exclusion from the next thousand days of Running Bases and stickball. Tanya and Marcia paid him no mind, and Rafe was forced to admit that he was not going to hit a girl any time soon. The girls cackled over their grimoire and threatened to turn us into rodents if we bothered them.

The rest of the stuff was equally inexplicable, and equally useless to us, but didn't seem very dark or magical: old clothes, pieces of sagging and empty furniture, boxes and boxes of shoes we didn't think anyone had ever worn. After a few hours a truck came and three large men who spoke a foreign language began collecting everything. When we claimed our three prizes, they shrugged and muttered and didn't cause us any trouble.

I spent the night staring at the photos, seeking clues. In one, the one where a group of people seemed to be running for their lives from a sparsely furnished room, and among the people there was a tall, bony woman tht could certainly have been Mrs. Gooly. I dug my plastic microscope from under the bed, dusted it off, and ran the photo beneath it, searching for clues. Up close the photo was just a grayscale jumble, darks and greys, dots. I did discover, on the edge of the print, what could only be a cat's tail, puffed, and the tail bit of a fleeing animal, one paw still barely visible as it fled.

The next day the five of us gathered across from the Gooly house and discussed our treasures. The girls had not been able to pry any secrets from the spell book, and were seriously considering bringing Marcia's older sister Maryanne into the discovery process - Maryanne being seventeen and well read, an untapped resource of knowledge for which we had never found a use.

Rafe had nervously cranked the mysterious box for a full five minutes, listening to its dry clickings, and came out to us on the corner convinced it was merely broken, and not mysterious at all.

Lewis had claimed the trunk, and had enlisted his older brother in dragging it to his house. He had not been able to pick the lock or otherwise break into the trunk, but felt confident that he would be able to, because his brother had learned how to pick the locks on the lockers at his high school

As would become the daily ritual of the summer, Mr. Benders emerged a few minutes later lugging a new load of stuff out onto the street, huffing and puffing. Pausing to catch his breath, he noticed us across the street and shook his head a little.

"You kids got no ambition, huh? Watching me clean this house out the best you can do? What happened to vandalism, or juvenile delinquency."

Rafe sneered at him. "Hey man, we're watching you have a heart attack: who's dumb?"

Mr. Benders surprised us by laughing, which turned into a bad coughing fit. Finally, he waved at us dismissively, and continued hauling three overstuffed cardboard boxes out to the curb. We waited until he turned his back on them, and then swarmed over to them. They revealed nothing more than a collection of faded tablecloths, musty and uninteresting. We settled down to wait for more treasures anyway.

Over the next few months, we watched Mr. Benders clear out the Gooly house with growing excitement, seeing mysteries heretofore unsuspected revealed daily, and our collections of oddities grew with each batch. Everything seemed to confirm our suspicions about Mrs. Gooly's nature: her possesions, once exposed to the harsh summer sun and our sharp inspection, were arcane and obviously heavy with black magic. We found a soft velvety bag filled with smooth, black stones. seized upon as magical stones. We claimed what Lewis identified as a camera, a black box with a lens protruding from one end. We could find no way to load film into it, and Marcia immediately began referring to it as the Soul Camera, a term which made us all shiver with expectation. Who knew what you might do with a Soul Camera once you learned how to use it? There was a long, smooth black rod, inexplicable but vibrating with implied violence. A glass cube. A small jewelry box filled with sand. Gold coins from some distant land none of us had heard of.

Every day Mr. Benders hauled a quantity of stuff from within the Gooly House, and every day we found new, arcane items to add to our collection. But no matter how hard we studied it all, nothing fell into place. The Gooly House made no more sense than it had before. I stared at the photos until my eyes ached, under my blankets with flashlights, but no inspiration came to me. They remained fuzzy, indistinct photos that may have been about amazing happenings, or simply badly photographed. We all fell into private and separate contemplations of the meaning of our treasures, and stopped talking about the Gooly House, and shared none of it.

Finally, the days bled into Fall, and school began firming up into a reality. We were dragged into clothing stores and department stores, we were measured and groomed, largely against our wills. Shoes were purchased. September came and we all began eyeing the calendar with dread, knowing that one Sunday evening we would be shuffled off to bed earlier than we'd become used to, and we'd be woken up earlier than we wished, pushed into good clothes, and pushed out the door with bookbags and bag lunches in hand, stunned, amazed, and regretful of a million things. Another summer gone.

Mr. Benders was finally done cleaning out the Gooly House by this time, and we didn't see him much that final week as he resumed the normal interior lifestyle of an adult. Our parents hinted that he was gutting the place and having it all redone in a more modern style, which seemed like grown-up parlance for driving out the haunting Spirit of Mrs. Gooly, which we all expected to see rise up from the chimney someday, hovering over the neighborhood angrily for a moment, and then fly off to possess a familiar, like a squirrel or cat. We'd fallen out of the habit of waiting for him outside his house anyway, and had finished the last two weeks of our vacation playing stickball a block away. Rafe bossing everyone but Marcia around. Marcia would just cross her arms and stick out her butt and tell Rafe to soak his head, and he would just give a sly Latin smile and shrug, as if it was all a big joke he'd cooked up. I hit a grand slam, and was a minor celeb for a day, something I still remember, since I don't hit very many grand slams.

The last Saturday of vacation we played basketball in the park, Rafe humiliating me and Lewis with various trick shots and in-your-face stuffs. We took it in stride, used to it. Walking home in sweaty, drooping clothes, Lewis suddenly looked up.

"Hey, y'know what? I never did get that goddamn trunk open."

For a moment we didn't remember what he was talking about. Then it hit us. The trunk! The Gooly Trunk! All the terrible secrets we'd imagined hidden in that house came flooding back, and I was sure that the key to it all, the last piece of the puzzle that had eluded us, was locked inside that trunk. All we had to do was get it open.

On the way to Lewis' house, he explained what steps had already been taken, and it became clear that Lewis and his older brother had exhausted subtlety. Picking the locks would not do. Brute force was called for. We located a hammer and chisel in the garage, where Lewis' mother had banished the musty old trunk, and dragged the trunk to the top of

their sloped driveway, a cool late-summer breeeze making us shiver in our sweaty clothes. Rafe took the tools up confidently, in charge, and we all stood around it as he knelt, pushed the chisel into the small gap of the latch, and raised the hammer up for a final blow at Mrs. Gooly.

I'll never forget what happened. I'll never forget the five of us, as we were. Lewis, pudgy but thinning with age, sheened with sweat, his eyes bright and wide, expectant. Marcia radiant, skinny, just beginning to hint at curves, her hair up, mouth open nervously, skin pink. Rafe, strong back bunched with muscle, curly hair matted from exertion. And Tanya, on the edge, already fading from our thoughts even when she'd still been there, just out of my peripheral vision. Saying something I never heard as Rafe raised the hammer, because

when he brought it down, there was an explosion.

Or so it seemed to me at the time. Certainly, the trunk exploded, splitting open with such force that the lid banged loudly on the pavement. And we all dived instinctively away from a sudden cloud of green, yellow, and tan: hundreds of tennis balls, Spaldings, Super Pinkies, compressed impossibly into a steamer trunk for years, freed with a startling expulsion of suppressed kinetic energy. Rafe was hit in the face by the lid flying upward, and landed hard on his back in the driveway. The rest of us were pummeled for three seconds by hundreds of hard rubber balls, and then found cover as the explosion turned into a steady rain of balls falling back to earth, where they then rolled down the driveway and into the street.

POEMS By Corrine De Winter

Called Back

Cleopatra's needles Lay heavily downward Injecting earth.

Vandals had sabotaged the graveyard, Inscribed tablets like wafers Broken in two.

The crocuses torn from their roots, Litter of marble and slate. Varnished quotes And disconnected dates

But Miss Dickinson's grave Stood erect, unmarred, Sturdy and white As polished bone.

The Sculptor

Ite assembled urns
For the ashes of the dead,
Although his own father's ashes
Remained in limbo inside a small box
On the mantel in his living room.

He collected broken pottery
That had laid for years
At the bottom of the pond outside the school,
Discarded long ago by students
As brittle mistakes.

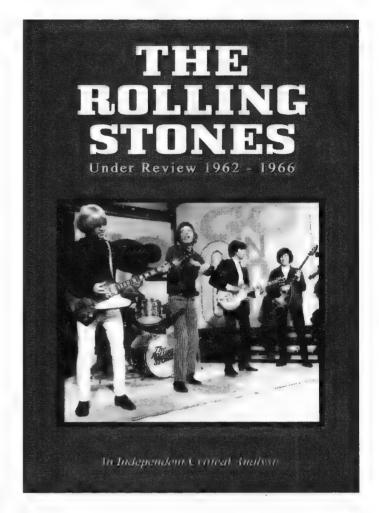
Retrieving pieces of past creation,
the recalled how he had fallen in love easily
With people, places, and things that seemed at first
To free him, and then suffocate.

That might've made him pure
If only he hadn't turned the affair
Into exotic fiction
And erotic prayer.



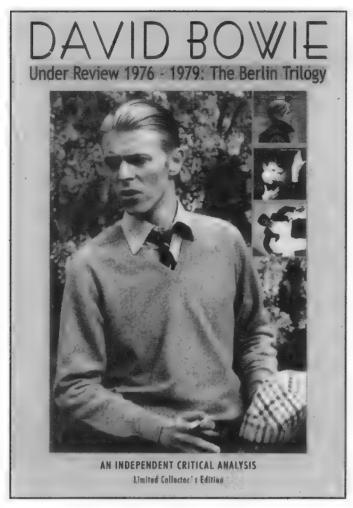
Under Review - The Rolling Stones 1962- 66 (MVD)

Quite simply, we are privy to the birth pains of Rolling Stones. A time when Keith was manfully struggling with the spirit of Chuck Berry, and Mick was wrestling with ghosts of blues singers past. The rhythm section of Charlie and Bill were killer and the band was absolutely knocking them dead live, but their set list had nary an original on it, and it took the kind auspices of Msrs Lennon and McCartney lending them "I Want To Be Your Man" to get them on the charts. It wasn't until their fourth lp, Aftermath, that they were able to muster the confidence to release a platter composed entirely of originals. Until that time, we are allowed to watch in abject fascination as our boys struggle to find a voice to talk with, one to call their own; and, in the interim, we are treated to some pretty cogent analysis, some pretty rare performance footage and all manner of ephemera in the form of archival interviews, present day reminiscences. (Dick Taylor of The Pretty Things is a standout) and groovy grainy photos.



Under Review - David Bowie and The Berlin Trilogy (MVD)

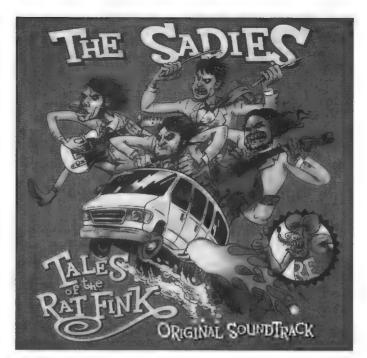
There was a time, before everyone and his sister were releasing compact discs, when a pop star could turn the world absolutely upside down with a new album. Such was the case with David Bowie's Low, first dropped on an unsuspecting public in January 1976. Two sides neatly divided between fractured Germanic funk fragments on side one, and eerie, portentious futurist soundscapes on the other. It was like nothing ever released before by a major pop star, and critics fell all over themselves declaring it to be Bowie's auto-da-fe. Time has shown that Low and its even more ambitious follow ups, Heroes and Lodger, have been enormously influential in guiding and, to a very large extent, shaping both popular and rock mu-



sic. Whether or not you believe that, this documentary makes a strong case for it, whilst providing an entertaining look at Bowie and his collaborators - Brian Eno, Iggy Pop, Tony Visconti. Perhaps, "entertaining" is not quite the word for Bowie, as he was suffering from the ravages of cocaine addiction during the early gestation of Low (he and Iggy decamped to Berlin together to help each other kick their respective habits), and he "appears" here only in snippets of concert footage and audio taped conversations. But by journey's end - and Lodger did just that, taking you all over the world sampling various pop styles - you'll find yourself anything but bored, more like an exhausted soujourner in a strange and exotic land.

The Sadies - Tales of the Rat Fink (Original Soundtrack)

No need to tell you that this is the soundtrack to the superstocked documentary about legendary wacko car designer and Revell hobby-kit maker, Ed "Big Daddy" Roth. What we need to let you in on is how this alt.country band has managed to meld the influences of Link Wray, Dick Dale and Duane Eddy, and pump out this twangy, reverb-drenched uber surf album. Check that – there are some groovy gasers, i.e., hot rod instros so turbocharged



as to leave present day practitioners - or is that imitators? - in the dust. But that's what happens, as Robt. Williams opines here, "When you bring the contemporary to what was then the thing" Twenty-six boss selections that manage to give full expression to the musical ideas contained therein, even though most are barely over a minute long. That's art, baby, the natural result of applying one's grooviness to what's happening now.

The Ubangis - Primitive Droppings From The Cave Floor 1991-2001 (Deceased Records)



Brian Horrorwitz and his mates nearly sank the fledgling Brutarian label before it even got out of the gate, taking an advance of five thousand dollars for what they promised was a brand-spanking new disc, and delivering, much to our dismay, this compilation of rare and lost tracks. Oh yes, and "Exploit Yourself," the five thou track. The nerve of some peoples' criminal children. And "lost tracks," my ass! Two of said tracks appearing here, "Monster A-Go-Go" and "Chickens For Christmas," come from vinyl singles released (and still piled up in our basement) and paid for, by Brutarian, almost fifteen years ago. That's not lost, Brian, that's stealing. Speaking of stealing, what's with the ghoulish uncredited takes on"Helter Skelter" and "Ubangi Stomp"? I guess that's why the boys have to sell this creepy disc out of the back of their hearse after their shows. Still, these Primitive Droppings do sell, at least in the Baltimore/DC corridor, and that, as you can guess, means a lot to our now bankrupt record company. Don't feel too sorry for us, though. If you like atavistic, garage rock smacking of deviancy, then walk, don't run, to the rear of the building after the next Ubangi show and pick this up before the cops show.

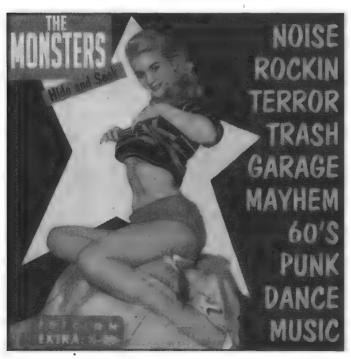
The Monsters - Hide and Seek (Voodoo Rhythm)

In a crass attempt to capitalize on the surprising underground success of the documentary, The Gospel of Primitive Rock 'n' Roll, the Reverand Beat Man has released this compilation culled from the first three Monsters' discs. Which is kind of surprising as the band is kind of a side project for this dadaist ur-rocker. Or maybe not; it's hard to tell with a guy who has thirty some discs with his name on them. As for the music, well the Rev. calls this

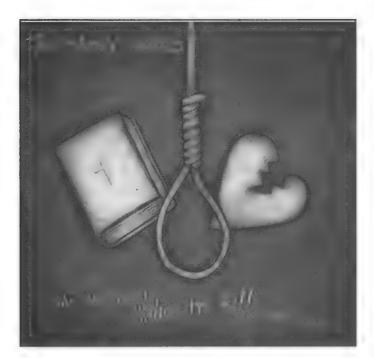
stuff "fuzz garage trash punk," and that's pretty accurate as far as it goes. But that's where it starts. The Monsters, on each and every cut, go further. Much further. Way down deep into the bowels of your sick little mind. Where your dirty little dreams are at play in the fields of perversion. The uninitiated may have difficulties. Stick to it and fight the good fight. For if you have made peace with your sordid, repressed desires, you'll ultimately find yourself dancing and laughing along with the guttural-voiced Beat Man as he pulls you out and down on wild trips like "I've Got The Brain Up My Ass," and "Go Away and Fuck Yourself."

The Dead Brothers - Wunderkammer (Voodoo Rhythm)

Phantasmal clamor of jungle birds, greeted by attenuated slaps to what sounds like an oil drum, both granting safe passage to a mournful Hawaiian lap steel guitar. A mournful voice o'er megaphone asks the listener to close the eyes and let the senses cease. In the distance, while we drift, a lugubrious trumpet salutes those who have passed, if not on, then before. Welcome to the eccentric world of The Dead Brothers, cabaret artistes extraordinaire. Don't get too comfortable, however, because what follows will have you sitting straight up: "Pine Tree Box," an unsettling rock stomp about a vampire; "Swing a la Grecque," a polka for tuba, trombone and trumpet; "Can't Get Enough," a blues for jaunty banjo; and "Mustaphpa," an aubade for belly dancer. It gets wilder, weirder and more wonderful as it goes on, but Hell, you could push the shuffle button on the cd player, and it would still continue to confound and amaze. Oh yes, and amuse and entertain; that's the first order of business for our Bros, even







when they're singing about suicide and lost love and, oh my, German matters.

The Bloody Hollies - Who to Trust Who to Kill Who to Love (Alive)

Those of you looking for hard blues-tinged rock on the order of The Stones and The New York Dolls or, to a lesser extent, Guns 'N' Roses, need to lend an ear to this. It took me about three months to get past the opening track, "Mona," a whiskey-soaked rant screamed over what sounded like two freight trains colliding. I've listened to it about a thousand times now, and it continues to fascinate. One, and perhaps the main reason, aside from its psychotic pull, is that the vocalist, Wesley Doyle, could not have done anything other than given birth to the lyrics at first take. Believe it; Doyle opens at full throttle, screaming about how much he misses his woman. Within a few bars, he drops the pretense to let us know that Mona probably isn't his. By the next verse, he's begging to be allowed to just look at this now possibly fictitious creation one more time. Finally, a dire warning that Mona's man stay away while shrieking that she, someone, had better get a gun. Former lover? Rejected suitor? Psycho stalker? It doesn't matter; we've got unbearable pain, heartbreak and sheer madness rolled into one little ball. Erupting, unbearably, hopelessly, into pure sound while the lead guitar overwhelms and pushes us over the edge into confusion worse confounded. Nowhere to go from here except onward - the next track, "The Rain" is about nuclear holocaust - or possibly outward to the farthest edges of your damaged psyche. Whatever, this guy Doyle is a major player, as both a vocalist and a guitarist. He's doing things at once familiar and otherworldly. Killing the things he loves with both a kiss and a sword.

Great Googa Mooga! UK IMPORT CD (Ace)

Mere words fail to encrapsulate me when it comes to transforbing a suggestabliming for the condacity of such a magunimous conauralization! And if you thought that sounded screwy, wait'll you here these 27, count 'em, 27, I said count 'em baby, 27 wild, wild, WIIIIIILD vintage rock-n-roll / doo-wop / r&b-ers! Including: "Heeby Jeebies" by Larry Williams, "Ting Ting Boom Scat" by The Jonesys Combo, "Yacka Hoom Boom" by The Savoys, and of course "Great Googa Mooga" by Tom & Jerrio! It don't get much more UNGAWA then that! Enclaustered with a frominant 20 page illustrated booklet and you can't lose! You could spend maglachlins of calenshrime trying to enscore a collusion like this and never come nanay to provurisermising this CD, but you'd probably refruberate trying! In contotaling, this CD is required tunering for every Neanderthal, Orangutang and Go-rilla! OOK! OOK! ~Brian D. Horrorwitz

Alarm Clocks – The Time Is Now (Norton)

After seeing and getting blown away by the reunited Raspberries four times in 2005, when I heard about The Choir (all original Raspberries except Eric Carmen) getting back together early this year for reunion shows at the Beachland Ballroom in Cleveland (in March, no less....and God, was it cold!!!), I just hadda go. While The Choir was most excellent, with Wally Bryson, Dave Smalley & co. kicking ass on primarily a good number of 60's covers, the real revelation that night for many of us in the crowd was one of the opening acts, the reunited Alarm Clocks, from Parma, Ohio. They are chiefly known for their one classic punk/garage single, "Yeah!"/ "No Reason To Complain," which has found its way onto numerous trashy compilations over the past 40 years or so, as well as the Norton-released Alarm Clocks LP titled Yeah! (the single plus a bunch of demo tapes they did in the mid-60's). Looking the worse for wear (bassist/ front man Mike Pierce looks like someone's overweight. overworked middle-aged uncle, maybe a lawyer or a CPA), the reunited Clocks blasted their way through some great Kinks/Stones/Dylan covers, and teased us with a couple of "new ones we just wrote." These guys were the epitome of a 60's garage band – loud, fuzz-toned guitars, incredibly snotty vocals (courtesy of Mr. Pierce), and just oozing with attitude. I ran into Miriam Linna and Billy Miller of Norton Records that night, obviously there to see their act, and they mentioned that they were taping the Alarm Clocks for a possible future live release, AND that the band would be going into a studio shortly, armed with new tunes, to make a new record! Eight months later, here 'tis...and it's a damn fine one!!! They've limited

their covers to two – perhaps the best cover version of "Like A Rolling Stone" that I've ever heard (also great live), as well as a close-to-the-Yardbirds arrangement of "I'm A Man." The originals, such as "It's About Time," "Don't Get Left Behind," "Marie," and "It's Been Too Long," among others, all sound like gems from the mid-60s that just got dug up from a time capsule. They don't make music like this anymore, dammit! At least, we still got bands like this fine one, though....(P.S. Norton also released a 45 of "Marie" prior to the album coming out. The B-side is a remake of Van Morrison's "Gloria," which destroys any version I've ever heard of 'this tune, aside from the original by Them. (John Oliver)

Bad Brains – Live At CBGBs – 1982 (Music Video Distribution) – Note: Available in both DVD and CD formats

In the last issue, in my review of Black Market Baby's excellent Coulda, Shoulda Woulda CD, I mentioned that I considered BMB to be DC's best ever punk band.... with the exception of the Bad Brains on their good nights - admittedly, infequent. On this recently released DVD and CD, you can see and hear for yourself just what this magnificent band was capable of on a good night. They were a perfect combination of punk and reggae music, played by excellent jazz/fusion musicians, and fronted by a very intelligent but seemingly mad-at-times singer (HR), who was equally capable of mesmerizing an audience of thousands with his vocal dynamics, getting into a fist fight with a drunk in the crowd, or simply not showing up at a scheduled concert. His bizarre behavior, combined with the band's conversion to the Rastafari movement (and the likely resulting brain damage from ganja inhalation), ended up in the Brains getting banned from most DC clubs. Around 1980, they relocated to NYC, and, while they will be forever associated with the DC punk scene, the Bad Brains wound up lasting a lot longer in NYC...where they recorded this newly released DVD and CD....and it proves that they rocked harder and faster than anyone at the peak of their game. All the classics, from "Banned In DC" to "Pay To Cum" are included here, along with the slower reggae numbers. Also highly recommended - the documentary film "American Hardcore," which contains plenty of Bad Brains footage. (John Oliver)

Bob Dylan – Modern Times (Sony/Columbia)

So far, I've heard a lot of raving about how great this album is, and, at the same time, a lot of bitching from old folkies who are whining about Bob's penchant for borrowing old blues songs, tacking on a couple of verses of original lyrics, and claiming the tunes as his own. Regarding the latter, it's true, he does pull a Led Zeppelin here, with Muddy Waters ("Rollin' & Tumblin", "Someday Baby" (Muddy recorded it as "Trouble No More")), Memphis Minnie ("The Levee's Gonna Break", originally "When The Levee Breaks"), and probably a couple of others. The fact is, though - Dylan is pretty much a blues singer at this stage of his career, much like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf in the mid-to-late 60's. He doesn't go in that much for the pretty folk songs or tricky melodies anymore, but, as in the case of his 2001 release, Love and Theft, tends to rely a lot on a 30s/40's jazz-inflected sound as well as Chicago Blues. Bob's still the world's greatest lyricist, though, and his band is fucking great! They are ungodly loud live, and the songs from this new CD sound superb live. Several of them ("Thunder On The Mountain," "When The Deal Goes Down," "Workingman's Blues #2"), I suspect, will be permanently added to the repertoire of Bob's Never-Ending-Til-He-Dies tour. At present, I don't know where this new album stacks up overall in the scheme of Dylanology....It surely doesn't belong in the pantheon of Bringing It All Back Home/Highway 61 Revisited/Blonde On Blonde, but what does nowadays? I prefer it over Time Out Of Mind, and don't think it's quite as good as Love and Theft. It's still good enough to blow away practically all of the competition for 2006, in my opinion. (John Oliver)

The Head Cat – Fool's Paradise (Cleopatra)

Sometimes, great ideas on paper just don't work out as a practical matter. For example, how about the idea of a rockabilly band with Danny B. Harvey (of the Rockats, Honeydippers, Swing Cats (with 2/3 of the Stray Cats), and solo jazz albums) on guitar, Slim Jim Phantom of the Stray Cats on drums, and...wait for it.....Lemmy of Motorhead on vocals and rhythm guitar??? "Hmmm...," you'd think, "this could be interesting!" Well, the band exists, and no, what they've recorded isn't particularly interesting...or very good, for that matter. On this "debut" CD (I use quotes because the same trio put out a CD of mostly the exact same songs back in 2000, on the same label, titled Lemmy, Slim Jim, and Danny B.), this trio butchers 9 Buddy Holly songs, some Carl Perkins, Elvis, Johnny Cash, and Eddie Cochran, and appear to be having a great time doing so. What's the problem, you might ask? First, Lemmy really can't sing...so he shouldn't try. If he just yelled his way through these tunes, with a really fast and thrashy accompaniment, much like, oh, let's say Motorhead, it might work. But he actually tries to sing the songs faithfully, as he's a huge rockabilly fan, and the players try to stay somewhat faithful to the original arrangements. Mistake! I'm not sure who exactly this CD

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is aimed at – Motorhead fans won't like it, nor will hard core rockabillies...and those of us who dig both sides aren't happy either. (John Oliver)

Howling Willie Cunt – A World of Filth (Cargo Records) The God Damn Whores – We Are The Lucky 13 (Cargo Records)

In the last issue, I reviewed the latest solo effort by Ginger, the crazed frontman of The Wildhearts, perhaps my favorite Brit band of the past 15 years. His double CD, Valor Del Corazon, was lyrically not very pretty, with most of the songs seemingly about Ginger's desire to get even with his long-time girlfriend (and mother of his children), who had dumped him when he proposed marriage to her, while admitting he had started using heroin again. I saw Ginger in New York City last Spring with his new band, The Sonic Circus, and he seemed like a totally miserable bastard on stage, telling the 50 of us in the audience that he'd rather be anywhere else. Hopefully, I thought, time would heal all of Ginger's wounds, and he'd bounce back and start making great music again, this time without all of the bile and vitriol. Well, here's his latest effort, a country & western album under his latest alter-ego, Howling Willie Cunt. If anything, the red-headed one has gotten ten times nastier and twenty times crazier, recording such original classics as "5,000,000 Ways To Kill Your Baby," "Say It With Herpes," "Your Heart Belongs To Jesus But Your Ass Belongs To Me," "9 Coloured Spastics On A Meathook," "Homosexual Punchbag In A Wheelchair," and the album's centerpiece, "I'd Rather Have A Dick In My Ass Than You In My Heart." The topics covered range from his dog licking his balls ("A Lil Bit Of Gravy"), to anal sex, dismembering his girlfriend and burying her in the garden ("Darlin' In The Garden"), to rewrites of "Country Road" ("Cunts On Roads") and "Wichita" Lineman" ("Colombian Lineman", who "wants still one more line"), to pedophilia - "Hand Of A Child," which just may be stepping a bit too far over the line! But then again, I don't think Ginger was planning on getting these played on the radio. The funniest and nastiest thing I've ever heard! Buy at your own risk.....

Random Jon Poole, the Wildhearts' bassist throughout 2004 and 2005, and formerly of The Cardiacs, a truly insane UK band, has also put out a new solo effort, We Are The Lucky 13, under his new "band," The God Damn Whores. I use quotes because Random Jon played and sang every part of this excellent new CD, although I understand he actually does have a band to tour and promote this material (including Jase Edwards of Wolfsbane on guitar and Ginger on bass/vocals). The songs sound like a cross between The Wildhearts, The Cardiacs, XTC, and Frank Zappa and The Mothers. They're catchy as Hell, hard-

rocking, and very quirky in structure. Poole is a monster player (not surprising, since his first solo album was a tribute to Zappa, with RJP recreating most parts of various Mothers' songs very faithfully), and could actually have a couple of potential hits on his hands with this CD, if he chooses to release several of the songs as singles. One of the best efforts of 2006. (John Oliver)

New York Dolls – One Day It Will Please Us To Remember Even This (Roadrunner Records) Radio Birdman – Zeno Beach (Yep Roc)

Even if nothing else happened of any consequence musically during 2006 (thankfully, not the case), at least I'm thankful for the resurrections of two legendary 70s rock & roll bands - the New York Dolls and Radio Birdman, both of whom put out terrific comeback studio albums which continue their legacies in grand style. First, regarding the Dolls' comeback CD, let me get this off my chest - NO, I wasn't delighted with the decision by David Jo and Syl to continue to use the Dolls' name. Yeah, I ALSO would have preferred that they used something original or catchy like, let's say, the Johansen-Sylvain Band...but they didn't! My advice to those who have trashed this new CD just because of that reason - don't let that ruin your chance to enjoy this fucking great album by the new band. They're playing the new songs live now, and they blend in seamlessly with their 70s trash/gutter rock classics...and that's saying one Hell of a lot! These guys (what's left of them) are still infatuated with the Rolling Stones, Shangri-La's and greasy R&B music. David Johansen has never sounded better (check out his pipes on "I Ain't Got Nothin" or "Fishnets and Cigarettes"), and the old band never quite sounded this good (primarily owing to the new ringers being better musicians) or rocked any harder ("Runnin Around," "Dance Like A Monkey"). Now, whether the new songs stand the test of time like "Personality Crisis," "Trash," or "Lookin For A Kiss," only time will tell....but this is definitely one of the best releases of '06.

Aussie rock & roll legends Radio Birdman (or at least most of them) have also regrouped (thankfully, in this case, nobody's dead) and put out a comeback studio CD, their first since Living Eyes, released in '79 or the early 80's, depending on where you live. Like the Dolls, RB put out an all-time classic debut desert island disk in Radios Appear, followed by the not-quite-as-good aforementioned Living Eyes, then dissolved, with most of its members staying active in music over the years (Deniz Tek as a solo artiste, the Visitors, Hitmen, New Christs, Screaming Tribesmen, etc.). Thankfully, chief songwriter Deniz T. still has his formidable songwriting

and guitar chops intact, and he and fellow Birdmen Rob Younger (vocals), Chris Matsuak (guitar), and Pip Hoyle (keyboards), along with a new rhythm section, are still a fantastically great band, as a recent 10 gig tour of the States (their first time ever on these shores) showed in spades. Again, as in the case of the NY Dolls, their new songs when played live blend right in with their heavily Detroit (MC5, Stooges, Sonics Rendezvous Band)-oriented power-pop-punk classics from the 70s. Is this as good as Radios Appear? No, but it'll do, and some of the songs ("Connected," "Hungry Cannibals") are instant Birdman classics, while it takes several listens for the others to grow on you...but they will. Two of the greatest comeback albums ever! (John Oliver)

Pernice Brothers – Live A Little (Ashmont)

Joe Pernice is one Hell of an enigma. He writes the catchiest tunes imaginable - the best sounding, sweetest power pop you will ever hear, with more hooks than a bait & tackle shop....and accompanies this gorgeous music. with a wistful voice very reminiscent of Colin Blunstone (Zombies).....singing lyrics that make you want to stick your head in an oven! He's been doing it for 6 Pernice Bros. albums/CDs now, including 2004's live Nobody's Watching/Nobody's Listening, and he shows no sign of letting up now. It makes one wonder - if he were to lighten up a bit with the lyrics, would the band be hugely successful? I doubt it. Joe's not exactly oozing with charisma on stage during the P. Brothers' live shows..... he's not a master showman, preferring to let his music do the talking. Likewise, he ain't much to look at either, at least not as far as what a rock & roller should look like. (Truth be known, Joe looks a lot like our beloved Editor/ Publisher Mr. Salemi – not a bad looking guy for a lawyer or a indie trash mag editor/publisher, but a rock star? No!) A telling sign might be the comment made by my friend Kim at the recent live Pernice Brothers show we attended - "They're the most boring band I've ever seen!" Now, while I don't agree with that statement, having seen The Strokes a couple of times, I, on the other hand was already a fan of the band, and this was Kim's first exposure to them. She likes some of the tunes of this new album, but thought that most of their songs sounded alike live. I believe Joe P. and company would have been a great singles band had they come along 30 years ago. But they didn't, so they will remain underappreciated. A damn shame. Pick this up if you want to hear some great tunes and excellent songwriting, singing and playing. (John Oliver)

Sonics Rendezvous Band – Sonics Rendezvous Band (Box Set) (Easy Action – Import)

Sonics Rendezvous Band (SRB), the legendary Detroit super group, featuring Fred "Sonic" Smith from the MC5, Scott Morgan from The Rationals, and Scott Asheton from The Stooges, is primarily known for their incendiary live shows from 1975 – 1978, along with one classic 45 (their only officially released recording), "City Slang." Bootleg live shows have appeared over the years, and two such shows surfaced a couple of years ago as CDs on the Mack Aborn label, Sweet Nothin' and City Slang, which were commercially available for about 10 minutes, due to the limited pressings. The British Easy Action label, which put out excellent box sets of the MC5 (Purity Accuracy) and Stooges (Heavy Liquid) over the past couple of years, rounded up a boatload of SRB material, mostly live shows and rehearsal tapes, and, with the approval of surviving band members, recently put out a 6 disk set devoted to this great but unheralded band. (NOTE: It appears that the Sweet Nothin' CD/show is here in its entirety. Much of the City Slang material is also here, mostly on Disk 6). As the material is pretty much in chronological order, you can get the sense of Sonic Smith growing into the front man role, at the expense of Morgan, who was clearly the better singer of the two (and a better writer, too, at least in the early days of the band). Rumor has it that this is what ultimately broke up the band. Based on the live material here, there were also some hellacious guitar duels fought between the two on-stage. Live, they were almost a perfect combination of the MC5 and Stooges, only with better vocals when Morgan was at the mike. After the band's demise, Smith settled down with wife/punk goddess Patti Smith in the 80's, occasionally recording with her, and he passed away in the early 90's. Scott M. has pretty much kept the band's memory alive through recording many of the SRB songs with his various bands and projects over the years (Hydromatics, The Solution, Dodge Main, Powertrane, and the briefly reunited Sonics Rendezvous, with the surviving members joined by Radio Birdman's Deniz Tek). Now, why no record company ever signed these guys - one would wonder. This is an expensive box set, but it's worth picking up if you're a fan of high energy, ass-kicking, take no prisoners Detroit rock & roll. (John Oliver)

Unknown Hinson – Target Practice (Coffin Records) Unknown Hinson – 21 Chart Toppers (Coffin Records)

While I reviewed Unknown Hinson's last release on

Capitol, The Future Is Unknown, several years ago, I finally got the chance to see the self-proclaimed World's greatest Country Western Troubador up close, live, and in person recently. He played a show at Jammin' Java, a coffee shop/café in Vienna, Virginia, and my God, what a great live performer! I had read reviews of his live act before, and never understood the Hendrix guitar references. If anything, his rockabilly/C&W picking on record was closer to Cliff Gallup or Danny Gatton than Jimi H. Live, however, he plays one Hell of a lot more guitar, and, in that recent show, he reeled off terrific versions of "Manic Depression" and "Voodoo Chile," in addition to hairraising pedal steel licks on the country songs, and jazzy lightning-like runs throughout the evening, accompanied by a bassist who resembles Colonel Sanders, and a wildlooking and white-haired portly gentleman on the drums. Anyhow, after the show, I purchased Unknown's latest offerings, 21 Chart-Toppers, which is actually his first, pre-Capitol recordings, and Target Practice, his latest fulllength gem. For the uninitiated, Hinson writes and sings the funniest, most tasteless and misogynist lyrics going, usually dealing with: (1) admiring, stalking, beating up, or being beaten up by "womerns;" (2) condemning "rawk" music as trash, and cussing out "hippies" with their "long, stringy hair;" (3) singing about the virtues of drinking "party liquor;" or (4) bragging about his "chart topping" looks and musical skills. His song titles run the gamut from "I Won't Live In Sin With You," to "Baby, Let's Play Rough," to "Love On Command." (In this latter song, he declares that his baby is a communist and un-American if she doesn't accede to his fantasy desires). All of this shit is expertly played and arranged (note the Nashville-like use of strings on the slower ballads) by Mr. Hinson, who, as I mentioned in the previous review, resembles a cross between Faron Young and Bela Lugosi in his Nudie suit, fake sideburns and vampire fangs. These latest two offerings are available via his web site (www.unknownhinson.com). Buy these - you won't be disappointed! (John Oliver)



THE BOY NEVER

There were times when he remembered his childhood, full of illness, terror and darkness, the secret games in the starlit garden..

-George Trakl

Your laughter, a thing that decays
As soon as it passes your lips.
No matter where you find yourself it is blue.
The Autumn has come too soon,
And the snow barely waits to fall.

No matter what words are spoken to you, They are fragile parchment, Something already living in the past.

Your smile, a crevice of deception.

A blind woman sits in its space.

No matter how you move,
It is a primitive motion.

The wind changes direction in front of you.

Your heart, if you could hold it, know it, trust in it, The red transience of everything that passes through it, Will always be a stranger to you.

In the silver of night, drunk, You wait for a mouth to claim you, To touch you Into existence.



Brando Unzipped – A
Revisionist and Very Private
Look at America's
Greatest Actor – by Darwin
Porter (Blood Moon
Productions)

Dom has been browbeating me for a couple of issues to review this damn book. OK, here goes....I've been wondering, ever since I bought this gem close to a year ago, just how Marlon Brando ever had any time to make movies. Per Mr. Porter, he was usually busy with a beautiful starlet under the sheets, or with a dick in his mouth, or his "noble tool," as he referred to his phallus, up some actor's backdoor....and sometimes all of these the same night, it appears! As "proof" of Marlon's homo tendencies, Darwin includes a photo that allegedly shows Marlon sucking life-long friend Wally Cox's "little Wally," taken as a practical joke at a party. (So who

doesn't do this kind of thing?) And yeah, that looks like Brando on the receiving end there! Per this book, Brando made it with (and this is just skimming from the top that I can remember offhand) James Dean, Monty Clift, Larry Olivier, Danny Kaye, Burt Lancaster, Rock Hudson, and Cary Grant, in addition to Cox. Oh, and that's not counting the ladies, including Vivian Leigh and allegedly two First Ladies (Eleanor Roosevelt and Mamie Eisenhower, you're probably thinking....). Essentially, a lengthy trashy tabloid, with practically all parties mentioned in it already 6 feet under, so there'll be no denials or confirmations. No real insight into acting technique or why Brando took a certain role or turned down another. Still, very enjoyable in a grotesque way. (John Oliver)

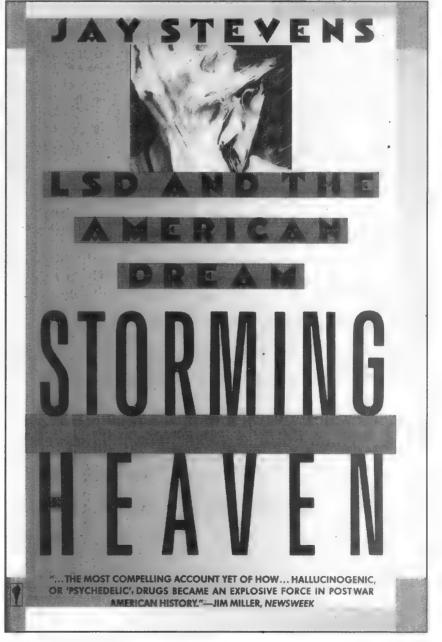
The Heebie-Jeebies At CBGB's – The Secret History of Jewish Punk – by Steven Beeber (Chicago Review Press)

Not a bad treatise on the subject of how the 70's punk rock movement in NYC grew out of post-Holocaust American Jewish experience in the USA. However, Mr. Beeber treats the subject of who's a Jew like it was the old game show they used to play on Howard Stern's radio show years ago. And frankly, yeah, we pretty much all knew that 2 of the Ramones, most of the Dictators, the Beastie Boys, Lou Reed, Lenny Kaye, Richard Hell, Chris Stein, Alan Vega, Hilly Kristal, and others were Jews. So what? Yes, being a persecuted minority leads to alienation, which causes things like the punk rock movement (NOTE: although, last time I checked, it was mostly govim leading the 80's hardcore punk movement), and such alienation results in the black humor displayed in the lyrics of many of the Ramones', Andy Shernoff's, and Lou Reed's songs, as well as the morbid fascination with Nazi paraphernalia that many of the punks nurtured and shared. So what's the big "secret"? Inquiring minds want to know.....Could perhaps the secret be that Jews everywhere don't really want to take credit for the punk movement because, when the smoke had cleared in the 80's, nobody had really made any significant cash doing this music?...which tends to invalidate the widely-held theory that all Jews are rich and they know how to make money? (Will Mr. Beeber next be writing about the Greenwich Village folk scene as

a Jewish conspiracy, or maybe the history of The Blues Project, AKA "The Jewish Beatles"?) (John Oliver)

Storming Heaven - LSD And The American Dream - Jay Stevens (1987) Perennial Library

A most useful corrective to, and anodyne for, the mainstream trashing of 60s psykedlic kulchur and concommitant dumping on Timothy Leary occasioned by the publication of a sensationalist biography of the good doctor. Corrective as one of the many important things you learn is that Leary was, despite the womanizing and character flaws was indeed, a genius, a brilliant visionary who, had he been left to his own devices, might have been



able to work a great change in nothing less then universal consciousness. Mistakes were made; how could they not have been when working with one of the most powerful hallucinogens in history? Still, before Leary was forced to shut down and resort to clowning and "Tune in, Turn On and Drop out," he was able to make real inroads into opening up the doors of perception. Important people, brilliant people like Alan Ginsberg, Richard Alpert, Ken Kesey, Aldous Huxley and The Beatles were following his lead and confirming his findings, conclusions based on Dr. Leary's thousands of controlled experiments with people from all walks of life. In the process, a fantastic, revolutionary counterculture was created, so threatening to the establishment that it had to marshal all its forces - media, organized religion, the health and psychiatric industry, the body politic - to crush it. Storming Heaven is the riveting story of the rise and fall of the psychedlic movement, from its inauspicious beginnings with Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman, to its final, fateful days on the streets of Haight Ashbury. One comes away-from it with a heightened appreciation for those attempting, against great odds, to seize the possibilities but also filled with regret for this brief and yes, ... shining moment in human history when, as another doctor, the late great Hunter S. Thompson observed, "There was a fantastic universal sense of whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning . . . that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that, our energy would simply prevail. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave."

The Resort - Bentley Little (2005) Signet Books

For the past fifteen years, Bentley Little has been writing sophisticated horror novels providing social commentary in addition to frights. His books take horror fiction to the next level. This is evident in all fourteen novels including The Policy, The Ignored, University, The Store, The Town, The House and his short story collection, The Collection.

The Resort starts out with one Lowell Thurston opting out of attending his twentieth high school reunion, choosing instead to book his family in a relaxing five-star, five-day retreat named the Reata located in the middle of the Arizona desert. Normally, that sort of vacation would be beyond the Thurman's price range, but during the summer, this lush getaway offers cheaper rates, as nobody is interested in being stuck in the middle of nowhere in blistering temperatures.

At first, the Reata seems like a paradise for Lowell, his wife Rachel and the kids – the exclusive resort has pools, a spa, a gym, fine dining and many sport activities.

But then, things start getting weird. The Thurman

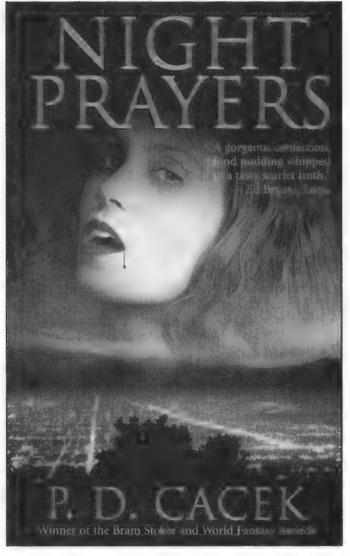
boys spot a dead body on the bottom of the swimming pool. A stranger takes over their room when they go out for the evening, and steals a pair of Rachel's panties (Why only one?)

The staff acts just as strangely, and what's worse, some of the guests start disappearing. And then, it's high school all over again – jocks, bullies, and the subtle pressure to conform. And, yes, there are unimaginable acts of violence. Ghosts too.

A surreal and strange trip, this is Bentley's best book since The Store - which was very good indeed - an imaginative and engaging variation on the haunted hotel novel, as good in its own way as Stephen King's The Shining. (Michael McCarty)

Night Prayers - P.D. Cacek (2005) Leisure Fiction

Stoker and World Fantasy Award winning author gives us, with this, her second full length novel, a terribly satisfying piece of pulp fiction. No attempts to render the horror



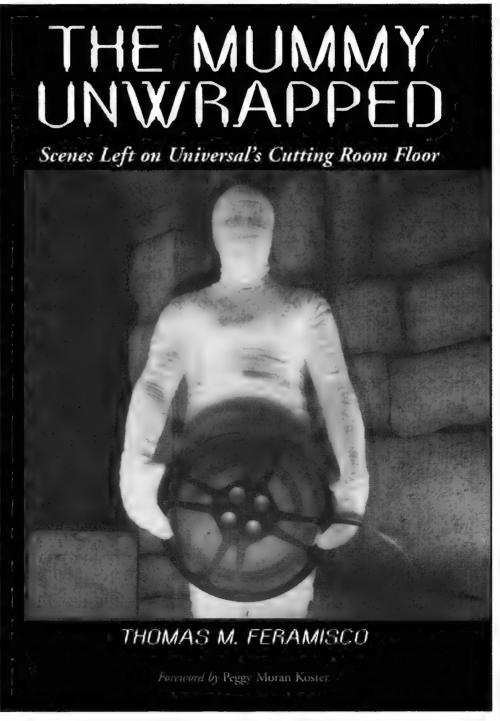
and grue poetic, no complex and ambiguously-motivated characters, nothing in the way of twisted plotting, just a good old fashioned evisceration of the stodgier aspects of the vampire mythos. In the process, Cacek also has a go at masculinity, sexuality, fetishes, lesbianism, Christianity, and the notion that a work of fiction needs one admirable protagonist, one character with whom you can identify, one for whom you root. Certainly, it's not Allison, an attractive thirty-seven year old loser at the center of our Prayers. She's a dimwit going nowhere whose idea of a good time is eating a box of chocolate mint ice cream in front of the television. She's made a vampire a few pages in, and her response isn't to rage against the dying

of the light or to wonder at the metaphysical implications of her change; no, she's annoyed much the way one would be at an outbreak of poison ivy. Despite her failure to appreciate the fact that her turning has compromised severely her, Allison manages to stumble and bumble her way to Los Angleles and a safe haven in a furvert strip club, a front for a coven of lesbian vampires. There, our putative heroine meets an equally dimwitted cast of characters, none of whom is the least bit engaging or interesting. A power struggle among the women ensues, the evangelical greeter for the club falls for Allison, the biker bouncer falls for all the women and comes to distrust the evangelical. The. reader will care not a jot; he'll be too busy marveling at the contempt which suffuses each and every word on each and every page. And the way Ms. Cacek casually mucks about with the rules of the game; her vampires can make their boobs and butts change shape at will, arraign themselves in the most dazzling garments fashioned from thin air, walk around in daylight (with sunscreen 95) and have sex with other vampires and humans. As disdain remains the operative aesthetic principal here, the sex is anything but erotic; in fact, Cacek goes out of her way to ensure your lack slipping into an of arousal: undead vagina feels like "a vat of ice cold oatmeal"; kissing a

bloodsucker tastes like moldy socks; men don't harden or become erect – their "balls jerk up into their shorts."

The Mummy Unwrapped - Thomas M. Feramisco (2003) McFarland

Amidst all the hoopla surrounding MCI/Universal's release of its classic horror movies in box sets grouped by monster - Dracula, The Wolfman, Frankenstein, etc. - The Mummy set appeared to get short shrift. Which



was to be expected, as most genre film historians, while acknowledging the original Boris Karloff 1932 vehicle as a classic, tended to dismiss the 40s sequels as pure hokum. And while only fanatics and Forrest Ackerman would make the claim that The Mummy's Hand, Tomb, Ghost and Curse are supernal works of terror, the quartet does have a few things going for it. First of all, they all move like a freight train. Due to budget requirements, Universal demanded that the films run no longer than seventy minutes. This resulted in little wasted dialogue, and an emphasis on story. And because the filmmakers didn't have much time to develop the story, mood and atmosphere became paramount. The viewer may not get the creeps watching their mummies; nevertheless. the attention is arrested and disbelief is easily suspended. There is also the pleasure to be had in watching always watchable character actors like John Carradine and George Zucco manfully strive to make something out of absolutely nothing. And yes, that is Lon Chaney, Jr. in the last three films of the series, lumbering about as the monster.

Film historian Thomas M. Feramisco takes an interesting approach with what could have been a decidedly dull topic. Certainly, he wants to make a case for what he feels are unfairly neglected films; more importantly, he wants to show you what might have been. Toward that end, he returns to the original scripts and painstakingly compares and contrasts what we see - or remember and what was left on the cutting room floor. But even if you don't remember, Feramisco provides a detailed plot summary at the opening of each chapter. He even goes the extra mile with his unwrapping of the original script for the final film in the series. Addendum chapters for the completist that one most likely is to become after being exposed to the author's witty and engaging prose, include biographies of all the major players and the directors who strove to bring Karis back to life.

Infrastructure: A Field Guide to the Industrial Landscape -- Brian Hayes (2006) W. W. Norton

Ever notice those field guides to birds in the bookstore, naming feathered bipeds from every region of the world and rife with photos of pre-rifled wing flappers? And you know those structures alongside roads and highways that can't be identified, much less understood, so alien in appearance that demonic activities must be occurring underneath the smokestacks? Well, the twain of those two subjects meets in Brian Hayes' Infrastructure: A Field Guide to the Industrial Landscape. Like its subject, it's bigger than the bird books, yet treats the industrial landscape as just that: part of the landscape and as natural, in its way, as a garden. Hayes contends that we should

understand this environment, for it's everywhere, affects almost every moment of our lives, and is often even beautiful.

He's right. I drive plenty, from one unattended reading to the next, usually from Michigan to New York City. After ten trips through the overly-wide state of Pennsylvania, one needs new distractions. For example, how about a quiz? Name the purpose of what I once called "balloon thingies" on electrical wires. Answer? Well, you're probably smarter than me; they're not present for a future high-wire clown show but to prevent low-flying planes from landing in a hanger rather than a hangar.

Hayes' solves all kinds of everyday mysteries. Detail? I learned more about manhole covers than I could have believed there was to know. Sixteen pages of text and photos explain varying types of transmission lines. More amazingly, I actually stayed interested in these topics, though Hayes might have pulled back his zoom lens a notch or two. Much of the ground literally covered fades fast from memory.

That aspect of the book is worsened by its encyclopedic approach and layout. First, when Hayes says "infrastructure," he means all of it, from the mining of natural resources to waste management. That aspect impresses but, with more restraint, would less tax the reader, allowing the memory to better function. More annoyingly, but often enlightening, are the nearly-countless sidebars. One can hardly read a page before bumping into a tangent just as the subject at hand begins making sense.

The thousands of photographs do the job. They're quite helpful in identifying structures. In fact, the book would serve the exact same function as field guides to birds, and offers interesting possibilities to cross-country trips. I haven't tried it yet but one day will. And that will occur in Pennsylvania.

Like it or not, this most visible aspect of humanity's inventiveness cannot be escaped. Even at the North Pole, satellites of love, amongst 600 other channels, beam their transmissions. <u>Infrastructure</u> is an important introduction to a world that surrounds us, which we rarely acknowledge. Minus occasionally-unnecessary jabs at environmentalists, Hayes sticks to the facts and explains with remarkable clarity the way the "unnatural" world works. For most of us, that's the world in which we live. (Paul Toth)

Staying Up Much Too Late: Edward Hopper's Nighthawks and the Dark Side of the American Psyche Gordon Theisen (2006) Thomas Dunne Books

Few have better painted urban estrangement than Edward Hopper. Gordon Theisen's exploration of the cultural ripples produced by Hopper's <u>Nighthawks</u> makes a persuasive case that it's much more than one painting

nearly everybody likes. The title may seem a narrow conceit that could only be pursued at book length by freshman-style stretching, but that's not the case. Theisen's insights are worth considering, and enriched with an array of references to American culture in general. The result: one develops a feeling for the anonymous painted characters. They become more threatening or seductive, and we begin to puzzle out what their lives must be like, which will leave me edgier than usual next time I visit the Double Negative Diner.

Thanks to Theisen, I now notice movie scenes instantly recognizable as being influenced, if not stolen from, Hopper's work. As an example, several scenes in "World Trade Center" appear like animated Hopper paintings. Seemingly, every cinematographer has borrowed those images at one time or another.

There's plenty of interest about Hopper, the man, too. Looking through my collection of his paintings, it's not hard to believe he was a cantankerous bastard. His rather strange sex life explains the oddly-shaped women he so often painted. One does not sense the passion for female form, but rather the exaggeration of a misogynist... On the other hand, the men don't look so great, either, so call Hopper a misanthrope.

Yet he does seem to care for his lonely subjects, lost in the apple, the big, Big Apple where one can't even find worms for friends without a good number of tequila shots under the belt. If you've ever lived alone in New York City and gone for a walk, especially on a windy day, marching into a gust intensified by the tunnel of skyscrapers, then you know what it is to feel so remarkably isolated that even a homeless person's demand for a cigarette becomes a memorable interaction.

Theisen also discusses Hopper's distaste for expressionism, and his "traditionalism" (for surely it is a warped form of traditionalism) remains controversial in that sad contest between "I know it's cool to like Hopper and so I hate his work" versus "I know it's not cool to like Hopper and so I love his work."

I like Pollack; I like Hopper. Hopper, Pollack, let's call the whole thing on. After all, why should every painting from any period share the same traits? Isms disappoint; call it disappointism. Fortunately, Staying Up Much Too Late does anything but disappoint, even if you lack any opinion at all about Hopper's most famous painting or the man himself. (Paul Toth)

The One Percent Doctrine -- Ron Suskind (2006) Simon & Schuster

I apologize in advance for the profuse use of quotation marks that follows, but it so often appears the administration is fighting a war in <u>support</u> of terrorism that what it says must be distinguished from what it ostensibly describes. However, no quotation marks are necessary

to name The One Percent Doctrine as the best-sourced, most-reliable account of 9/11 and its aftermath. To prove that contention, I've read my share of such accounts, and rarely discover anything I hadn't already know from even the most trivial documentary. But more remains to be learned about 9/11, as the information keeps coming, from photos of the hijackers smiling for the camera to this Texas-breakfast glass of juice: Not long before the attacks, Crawford's favorite visitor was interrupted by a "panicked CIA briefer" giving notice of a seemingly-imminent terrorist threat. The president's response? "All right. You've covered your ass."

I wouldn't call that enlightening, for we already knew the lights have been off in W's head since birth. The true revelation comes in Suskind's representation that ex-CIA Director George Tenet was screwed. Apparently, Tenet never said the words "slam dunk" in reference to Iraq's supposed WMD. Rather, that phrase was an invention of the usual suspects. The real wielder of the knife, however, was Condi Rice, a Machiavellian, shoe-shopping schemer with far less ability in foreign policy than underhanded, domestic power plays.

Thus, we step one foot deeper into the quicksand of the postmodern GOP, where lies hide lies hide lies. Our noses begin to fill and we simply cannot breathe. Yet Suskind is rather sympathetic to Bush. It seems that Bush means well, just not as well as he "achieves" being mean. The man demands loyalty and offers none, or offers it so long as his every wish is granted, like a child. In fact, there's something so infantile about Bush's character that one almost wishes to feel sorry for him, except that he possesses everything necessary to an informed outlook. His education, even his wife, should have fostered a respect for books, literature, knowledge. Instead, he chose belief, first in cockiness and second in "God." Not surprisingly, Jesus always agrees with George or the latter would surely be an atheist.

Now the CIA's current "leader," agrees. Magical thinking "wins" the day, only I'm afraid the magic at hand is black, darker than the shadows in which hideaway Cheney decided terrorism would be fought. How else could we have managed to render a nation in worse condition than it was under the thumb of a megalomaniacal dictator? And how did it happen? At best, it occurred because of the book's title, which was borrowed from Cheney's policy: A one-percent chance of danger would be addressed, peremptorily, if necessary. That, of course, sets the bar so low that any of us become suspects and any nation a "collaborator." With 99 percent latitude, not much of the world remains safe from ill-advised interference. The principal losers -- Powell, Tenet -- were screwed, royally, but they let themselves be screwed to maintain closeness to royalty, or the closest thing we have to it.

Will we win the "war against terrorism?" How could we? If anything, we've given the world 911 more reasons to hate this country when, for a while, they had the same or more number of reasons to at least momentarily empathize with us.

Even more sadly, there are good people in government. Unfortunately, more powerful people in government stop them from doing their jobs. The price will be paid by anyone but Bush, for he will be long gone, gathering sticks and peering at the sun until, like Oedipus, it blinds him in fact as well as metaphor.

If you want to read a single account of 9/11 and its aftermath, this is it. (Paul Toth)

Drowning in Gruel - George Singleton (2006)

Like a phone call never returned or a lost lottery ticket that turns out to be worthless after all, the quirky fictional town of Gruel, South Carolina is a place of missed connections, muddled hopes and misguided love. In George Singleton's collection of short stories, Drowning in Gruel, his homes and streets are realistic enough, but they serve mainly as a kind of knick-knack shelf to display free-thinkers, weirdos, misfits, crazies and hoboes for our viewing pleasure. It's a menagerie of deep-fried southern ambition gone wrong in so many ways, and for so long, that you feel constant pity and rueful laughter coming on as you read. The humor hits you deep in the gut, as it is steeped in what-ifs and too-bads and fill-to-bursting sorrows. It is about what you would expect for a locale so down on its luck that everyone is just passing through, or wants to be.

I felt oddly drawn to Gruel, and grateful for an opportunity to visit there, despite its existential sense of discomfort and dislocation. Singleton is masterful at sketching out unique characters and situations quickly. There's Watt, whose stalled and unhappy life as a restaurant carpet cleaner gets vacuumed up like so much dirt, when he becomes caught up in the whirlwind national tour of his acclaimed dog. But the chance for a real transformation in his life is swept away bit by bit as the tour drags on, and the opportunity for change seems, in retrospect, ephemeral as a speck of dust. The dog was a stray, at heart, and perhaps that was the root of the problem.

But perhaps, there are no real roots to these conditions—perhaps life is simply a battle with expanding, growing, mysterious and often stultifying forces: lives cramped by emotional kudzus. We don't necessarily like these characters, but we relate to their struggle to break free from their limitations.

These are wandering southerners coming home to roost and, perhaps, thieve and poach a few items from their neighbors before sitting down with a Bible. These are con artists and inventors and liars who may have left the South at some point, but now they've come home emotionally scarred, and unable to tell art from reality. A good number of these folks go stark crazy before our eyes.

In reading this book, I reached a point where I started

to feel a little loony, like someone overstaying a visit with a distant, doddering relative. In my experience, craziness is not something to be sketched or played with, and stood upright for viewing like one of those souvenir dashboard figures. It seems a bit too facile to have characters entrance us with their weird observations for just a few minutes, and then shortly reach for a shotgun. Singleton sometimes overreaches and overdetermines instead of letting his characters be.

My favorite writings here are those that end with a hope and a prayer, as he does in "Migration Over Gruel." It tells the hilarious story of a public relations fiasco, in which scores of tourists are lured to Gruel to view a falcon homecoming, with promises of hundreds of swooping birds filling the air, when, in fact, no falcons will appear at all, and never have. The setting provides ample opportunity for local misfit Markham and visiting Sharon to make a tenuous connection. Sometimes that is all we have, and all we want. (Alice Lipowicz)

Whores In History: Prostitution in Western Society - Nickie Roberts (1993) HarperCollins

The dozen or so wartime Parisian "penfriend" women are seated together, cramped awkwardly on chairs and mens' laps like big dolls, with eyes wide open and dark lips. Here and there, there's a smear of emotiona fiercely-set mouth, a sharp eye-but mostly these doyennes are focusing their thoughts inwardly rather than communicating to the camera their pleasure, sadness or erotic knowing. Of the four soldiers in the photo, two hide behind cigarette smoke blown through their nostrils. One man in the center smiles openly, apparently feeling lucky to be in this bordello.

This is the type of evidence history presents us of the lives of prostitutes: a few photographs, a few texts, small numbers of items and limited data. The scanty source material makes Nickie Roberts' achievement in "Whores in History" all the more impressive in her ability to tell a coherent and entertaining story of a long-hidden aspect of Western society. This is no penny-weight peep show. Roberts maintains a serious, sincere voice suitable for a scholarly chat by the fireplace, while offering enough erotic titillation that the reader occasionally is distracted by images of endless orgies, monk-on-girl action and vulpine women whose specialty was to cry out like wolves. But even with all those narrative sex toys strewn about the place, Roberts comes across as a narrator to be reckoned with.

A former prostitute herself, Roberts cites sources such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the works of Euripides and Ovid to support the idea that prostitutes, from ancient Greece through medieval times, suffered little social shame or stigma. In those halcyon days, with a few exceptions,

women were free to sell their sexual services without fear of ostracism, and many became wealthy through such commerce, Roberts writes. These are not the hardened spirits we think we know, but sexually, economically and even spiritually empowered women.

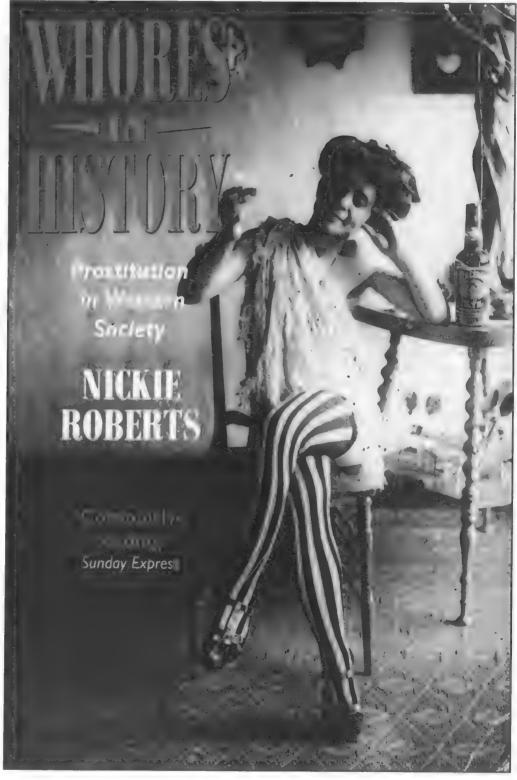
Roberts presents her case engagingly, quoting from more than one hundred texts; yet she is not entirely convincing. According to her, the strong moral prohibitions against prostitution did not take appear to a large degree

in Western society until the Reformation, and did not find firm footing until the preindustrial age. The modern period is a time of hypocrisy and uncertainty, with sexual labor barely tolerated in many Western countries.

What we have here then. is a tome which, telescopelike, is most persuasive in its view of the distant past, and becomes ragged and disjointed in the more complicated present. A book addressing such an ambitious topic stirs more questions than it answers—about the nature of sex, love, identity and economic survival, to name a few. That Roberts' work can be the start of serious discussion is a good thing. Still, as when introducing politics and religion into a discussion, there is a sense that when the topic of prostitution teeters into the room, emotions fill one's head and rational thinking stops. Despite our idealism. we live in a world in which children die from poverty, men beat their wives, and many women-not middleclass porn actresses, but poor women--sell their bodies for sex, not because they enjoy it, but to survive.

Roberts' final product, alas, is a thin garment for covering the contours of this subject matter. Unfortunately, her polemic does not quite stretch far enough to fit Western civilizations' tricky figure flaws. Nevertheless, this book is not to be missed. Pygmalion-like, the humble

whore emerges from the shadows of a sordid past all spiffed up and ready to declaim on her identity at college campuses and lecture halls. We can thoroughly enjoy this performance, as there is nothing sexier than a smart woman making the most passionate argument of her life. (Alice Lipowicz)





Remember those days in college when you felt overwhelmed, realizing that a majoring in the fine arts or English or philosophy was going to get you nowhere? Remember what you did on days like that? That's right, you hit the used disc and record store to hang out. The folks working there were always happy to see you, to chat you up, to hip you to the cool new stuff. And if the staff was too busy, perusing the stock worked as a delightful anodyne for your existential malaise. Admit it, you often came away thinking, "Why don't I drop out and just go to work at the beat record shoppe?" Well, be glad, very glad, you didn't act on this impulse, because BROKEN RECORDS, a humorous and sarcastic diary of one young woman's year of toil inside one of these seedy emporiums, will shatter your illusions about what you probably still believe to be a hip scene. That's because you never stopped and thought about working for eight hours in a superannuated space with bad heating and leaky air conditioning, at less than a minimum wage. Sure, some of your co-workers became fast friends and the others, at least, had a passion for unusual music. But what about the insane and the mental defectives and the perverts making your life a living Hell by treating the store like it was their living room or sometimes - ack! gak! - their bedrooms, or God help us, their bathrooms. Read this wonderful little one off and weep, weep tears of joy that you finished college and took that job with McDonald's or Home Depot. (Write to the author at xsonicdeathx@ graffiti.net for availability)

Blogs have replaced the per or personal zines for the most part; still, there are souls undaunted like Davida

Broken Records

(the memoir of a record store clerk; a perzine)



Gypsy Breier and her Baltimore-centered LEEKING INK. Davida informs us in the introduction that issue twenty-nine is to be the first "non-depressing" installment in a long time. Toward that end, we are graced with a short essay on the virtues of hot yoga, a humorous accounting of acclimating oneself to a '66 Valiant with more than its

share of problems, and a celebration of the joys whilst attending trapeze school. The centerpiece of this installment is the most moving, a meditation on self and soul set amidst a trip to the Bahamas with an estranged boyfriend. There's more to be had here, but what you need to know is that like the best perzines, you end up caring, and caring deeply, about the flawed, fascinating individual behind the project. (Two dollars to: Box 963, Havre de Grace, MD 21078)

A zine with no particular relevance to anything. and with little concern in entertaining anyone other than its staff, GO MET-RIC somehow, someway, appears highly relevant. It's difficult to put a finger on the reason; although the highly literate scribes behind this thick, photocopied zine would have you reason not the reason. They are pop junkies, and they are here to entertain and amuse with their rants, interviews, lists, essays and reviews. As with the thirty-five year old pro-wrestling fan and his fantasy script for a tag team and their year long run through the WWE. Not to your taste? There's a ten thousand word mediation peened at a writer's roundtable on rock 'n' roll history and the imagined consequences of certain epochal events - Buddy Holly's

and Ian Curtis' untimely deaths, Badfinger not ultimately flopping - not taking place. A whole new genre of film, the Greaser flick, is unveiled for your edification, with an accompanying jeremiad over the musical Grease, and how it miserably fails to measure up. Granted, the criteria are made up on the spot, but what matter that as the Travolta

GOMETE C

Knights of the New Crusade

Anti-Christ's Live Journal

Supersize Meg-Vegan Style

Paul Wolfowitz: On the NYC Punk Scene

The 8-Track Gorilla

Elton John's "Johnny B. Goode"

#20

...What If?

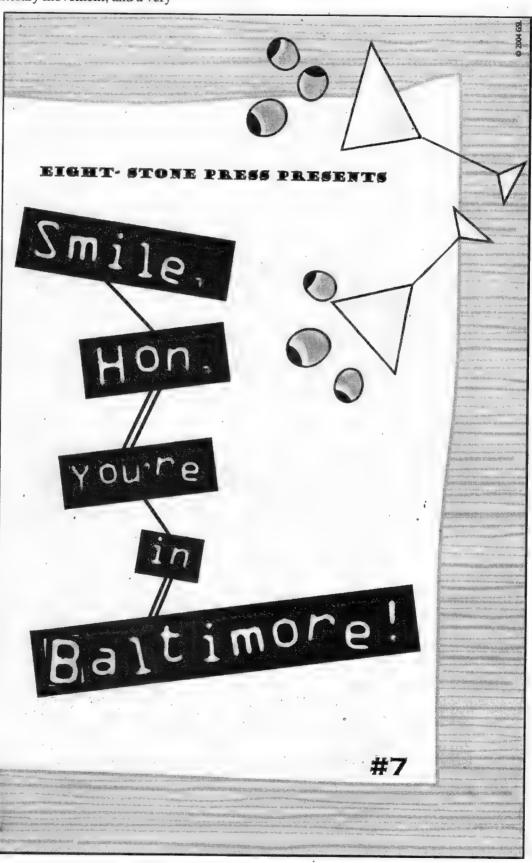
FICTION MOVIES COMICS REVIEWS

musical, under almost any standards, even those of an interplanetary visitor, must be adjudged an alarmingly cretinous endeavor. Fantasy plays a great role here: there's a brilliant piece about Literary Anarchists Mobilizing Everywhere, a radical internet literary movement; and a very

funny interview with an evangelical Christian rock band calling themselves The Kinghts of the New Crusade. The writer swears the latter exist, but as the combo play in full Knights Templar outfits, swords hanging at their side and the fact that their first release is on Jello Biafra's Alternative Tentacle label, one could be forgiven for being a bit skeptical. What the hey, this is supposed to be the fiction issue, so maybe we're entitled to not believing any of this, not even the sincerity behind the record reviews which make fine reading on their own, a remarkable novelty in an underground magazine. (Ten bucks for five issues. Write to gogometric@yahoo.com for more info.)

If you want to know what Baltimore is really like, the Baltimore where the drinks are cheap and the food portions are generous, then you need to pickup a copy of SMILE, HON, YOU'RE IN BAL-TIMORE. This is the not-so-charming part of Charm City, the darker places where you often meet the mad, bad and dangerous to know. you keep your head on straight, however, you'l come away with some great stories as editor. William Tandy does, and make friends with wild poets - contributors all alcoholic gourmets (the great zinester Dan Taylor), urban sociologists

like Atomic Book owner Benn Ray and gritty photo realists (their work adorns the zine). The publication is, naturally, a big hit in Bal'mer so write to eightstonepress. com for availability of this and back issues.



A little magazine of fiction, humor and miscellany - that's how the highly and ornately literary JOHNNY AMERICA describes itself. Loosely translated, this means

that these most likely college professors are writing for the amusement of themselves, as they know that almost no one reads zines any more. So what we get is: flash fiction. stories ending so quietly and without fanfare that you're into the next one without realizing the preceeding tale has ended, reviews of books that do not exist, a guide to Halloween recordings, even though the zine is published para-annually.

memoir in which the absurd courts the vulgar, a minicomic insert about a boy and a zombie. All pasted between horrific surreal covers suitable for framing. (Write in a cryptic style to

We may have GENreviewed **ERATION** EX-PLOITATION in a previous issue but, frankly, we can't remember. Like Congressman Foley we'll blame the alcohol (as Catholics we were also abused by priests in one manner or another, but we're not ready to blame Mother Church for this possible snafu) and lead in with a joke. Here it is: You know you're an alcoholic

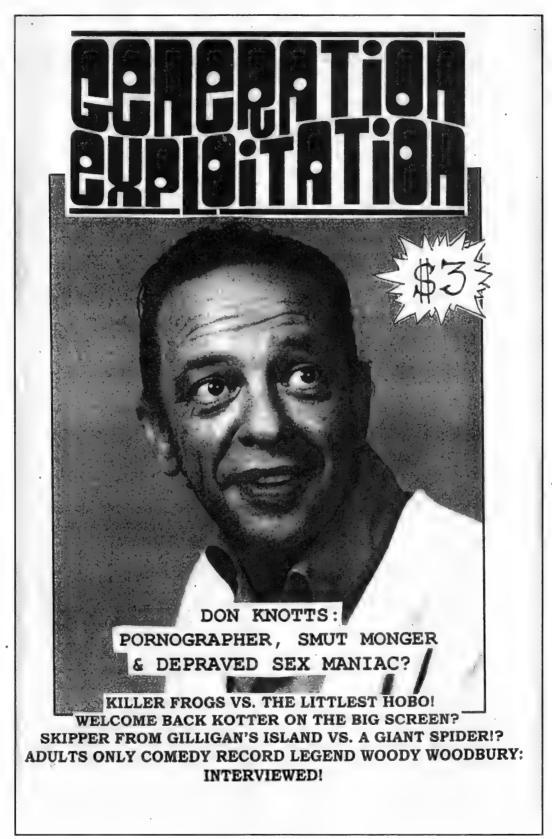
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when the cops set up a sobriety checkpoint in your driveway. Ain't that rich? Ah hah hah hah ha! What do you mean you don't think that's funny? It's a stich. And the



kind of joke that legendary 50s comic Woody Woodbury would most likely open up with. He's the feature interview in this wonderful zine, and he goes on for more than thirty pages about greats like Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, Jack Paar, Buddy Hackett and a kind of showbiz that has long since faded. But you get a lot more than that

for three dollars: entertaining reviews of film obscurities and an overview of Don Knotss film career. Trash celebrations don't get much better than this so send your hard-earned dollars immediately to the above-named zine at 8-1730 E. Pender, Vacnourve B.C., V5L 1W4.





Bad Dreams - (d) Andrew Flemming (1988)

A re-release of a relatively uneventful horror film, likely to disappoint fans of the hilarious cult film, Dick (1999). This outing finds the nubile Jennifer Rubin waking up in a modish insane asylum after a thirteen year coma. Said coma was the result of cult leader Richard Lynch setting fire to himself and his American-Gothic-styled retreat, and asking his zany acolytes to come along for the ride. Jennifer says, "Ix-nay" to that, and is bonked on the head by a falling beam whilst trying to escape. Now she's awake, in group therapy, and has the burn-ravaged ghost of Lynch stalking her (a mistake as Lynch's real-life burn scars have left his face so painfully taut that it's almost impossible to look at him without wincing) and demanding her suicide. Jennifer takes the not option on this request as well and Lynch, for reasons never quite explained, begins to knock off, one by one, all the members of her therapy group. Who, individually as well as collectively, are a pretty exasperating bunch, so no harm, no foul here. We want to see these pathetic whiners die horribly, painfully and slowly, but Flemming, refusing to indulge his putative audience, knocks off his supporting cast in fairly unimaginative ways, eschewing the gore and blood for the most part. Kind of surprising, as Dreams draws heavily from the preceeding year's Nightmare on Elm Street III - which also featured Rubin - yet contains none of that film's humor or panache. Nor does it allow Bad Dreams' one redeeming asset, Rubin's lithesome body, to fall out of the shapeless hospital gown she sports for most of this tedious exercise. If you must watch, however, know that

Jay Ferguson of Spirit provides the incidental music and makes inventive use of The Electric Prunes "I Had Too Much to Dream (Last Night)" and The Chambers Brothers' "Time Has Come Today."



She-Mob - (d) Manuel S. Conde (1968)

What we have here, is failure to communicate. On any, and every, level. The brain-dead cretins involved with this sexploitioner thought that by throwing nudity, lesbianism, karate-cat-fighting, soft-core sex, gratuitous violence, and hateful, idiot dialogue, that they'd somehow, someway, end up with a diverting entertainment. It's all wrong, and that's what's all right with She-Mob. Maybe not. The girls are ugly, the action sequences abominably choreographed, the acting from hunger, and the story lesbian girl gang kidnaps gigolo for ransom - appears to have been made up in situ. Yeah, that's the same actress playing Brenda, the gigolo's keeper, and Big Shim, the dyke in black leather with the matching bullet bra. And yeah, that's Honey West in the form of Sweetie East, a gap-toothed blonde with pancake tits, and an ill-fitting gold-lame outfit. And yeah, again, if you think those are some of the worst-looking breastes you've ever seen. It's a fucking nightmare, a retard's take on Mickey Spillane, with scenes that go on and on and on, and sex that goes on and on and on, and there's no climax or resolution, and finally it's over, and you're not sure what you just saw, and

whether you can even tell anyone about it, as it may all have been a dream. Or a nightmare.



Flesh - (d) Brett Leonard (2005)

So we take a pretty damn cool premise, which has these latent homosexual buff guys with a mommie fixation, picking up morbidly obese women and convincing them that the fatter they get, the more the world will love them, and then putting them on the Internet and taking odds as

to how long they have before they choke to death on their next bucket of slop and . . . and you hem and you haw about whether to make it a police procedural or a horror film or a feminist allegory, and, of course, you end up with a mixed-up, muddled mess. A mess that's kind of fascinating, as you're given an Interpol detective with a beautiful girlfriend who likes getting naked and kinky in every frame, a wonderful actress in a prostethic fat-woman freak-show device chewing the scenery for all it's worth, oodles of vomit and rotting food, and a screenplay telling us, in not so many words, that life stinks, so eat, drink and indulge your sickest fantasies because you tomorrow you diet. The kicker is that the flick is supposedly based

on a real-life subculture known as feedergainer, but if it's even remotely like what we get to see here, you don't want to do the google search.



Creep - (d) Christoper Smith (2004)

A marvelously realized, good-ole fashioned monster film with deftly-realized and sublime production values, and highly-accomplished acting that misses classic status only because it fails to have the courage of its convictions. What it wants to be is down and dirty, but it eschews gore and the nudity for the more sedate "buses" - that's Val Lewton horror speak - and character development. Which is kind of silly when you have Franka Potente, in hot red lipstick, high black heels and a bright yellow skirt and blouse ensemble a good two sizes two small, running around London tube stations, attempting to avoid being diced and sliced by a mutant cannibal. Yeah, Ozzy understands, you think it's just the old immature boyo needs kicking in. It's not; Potente wouldn't be dressed like this if the filmmakers weren't indulging their own fantasies, and why, then, is there a scene where the titular monster spends about a thirty seconds or so pushing a bone saw in and out of a captive woman's vagina. See, if you're gonna put a sick scene like that in here, don't pretend you're merely upping the ante late in the film. No sir, you're a sick misogynistic bastard, and so why not let it all hang out? Get Potente naked or have her at least flashing crotch and breasts occasionally. And don't be so stinting with the blood and entrails; my God, the surgery scene you cut, Mr. Smith was not only the most vile thing Mr. Fide's seen in ages, it was kind of a horrific thing of beauty as well, what with the quick edits and dissolving shots and the swirling camerawork. Despite the filmmakers' cowardly

inability to deal with their own perverse natures, this is a fright flick that's definitely several cuts above.



Hard Candy - (d) David Slade (2005)

Yeah, Mr. Fide would rather not get into the subject of pedophilia, but he feels duty bound, as this film simply crosses the line, even for this lover of all things exploitive. Why? Because Hollywood and the video companies are marketing Hard Candy as just that: eye candy to get perverts across the land harder than tungsten steel. Like Lolita, however, this story of a fourteen year old nymphette turning the tables on a thirty-two year old chat room stalker, plants itself firmly in the realm of art, so one can take some small measure of satisfaction in the knowledge that Slade's work will likely enrage sickos everywhere. Still, did the producers have to let everyone know that they cast a beautiful young teenager in the role? And was it really necessary to foment the rumor that said teenager, Ellen Page, was only fifteen and an unknown when she was, in reality, an actress of seventeen with almost two dozen film and television appearances on her resume? those publicity shots: Ms. Page on a couch moderne, her legs spread as she provocatively balances on one knee, sporting a midriff -bearing tube top, short skirt and sexy red nylons. The tag line, "Strangers should never talk to a little girl;" now to whom is that supposed to appeal? The fair-minded may retain a doubt or two; but they are finally, ineluctably dispelled by the poster art showing our young heroine in a red hood standing inside, not outside, a bear trap. She may be jailbait, yet there's the risk that the trap could close on her. So, even if Hard Candy merits only an R rating and not an X, and even though the film comes from Hollywood, not West Virginia, we rightly expect to see some pretty steamy stuff. Like our alluring teen showing off her lovely lithe body and tiny, pearshaped ass. And posing in her taut tight white panties. And maybe, just maybe, even allowing us a glimpse of what must be, pert, barely-formed breasts. Ah, perchance to dream; nevertheless, we will most definitely be privy to a lot of naughty naughty teeny talk. None of which we, thankfully, get; as after a promising opening, the film becomes little more than a dialogue between the bound creepo and our pluckly gamine over, well, over nothing at all really. It's little more than a sophisticated accusa-

tion-denial routine, and by the time we are treated to the centerpiece castration scene, ennui has firmly settled in, leaving us too fatigued to care.



Lemora - (d) Richard Blackburn (1972)

Banned by the Catholic Church, so you know it has to be good. Think about it, why does the richest and most poweful institution on the planet care enough to censure an independently-released Grade-Z horror movie? Answer is: the handling of its themes of incest, pedophilia and lesbianism are so heartfelt and intense that is poses a danger to us all. It's a refashioning of Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla, told from the eyes of a lovely blonde prepubes-

cent, and, despite the impoverishment of the production and its cheap special effects, Lemora's relentless air of depravity makes for genuintely unsettling viewing. The set up: an angelic blonde, Lila Lee, a thirteen-year old orphan, fleeing from the clutches of her adopted father, a peophilic Southern Baptist, and running into the arms of a lesbian vampire, who loosely holds sway of a community of vampires. It's all told from the point of view of Lila Lee, so little of this makes sense, but the incoherence of the narrative, as the film progresses, makes it al the more disquieting. Lemora is the mother, calling to her child from beyond the grave with promises of the father.

A father who may, as possibly one of the undead, have designs on her as well. As do all the living she meets on her strange journey to the necropolis ruled, loosely, by Lemora. Ultimately, there is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide; everyone wants our choir-singing innocent, even the young vampire children housed by the putative mother. In the end, the only escape is to give your body, your soul, to the one offering a safe haven. And with such surrender, there is no forgiveness, only the acquisition of power, power that gives you hold over men and, thus, societal institutions seeking to make you a slave to your own sexuality.

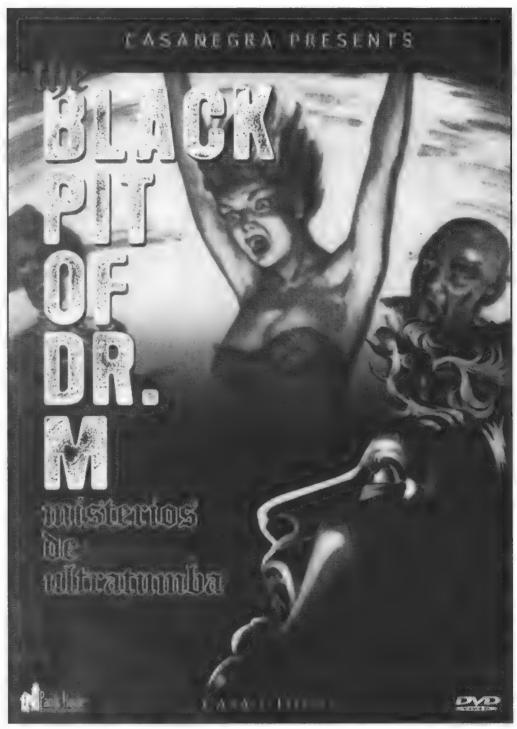


Black Pit of Dr M - (d) Fernando Mendez (1956)

Otherwise known as Mysteries of the Tomb, a 50s cult classic finally seeing the light of day after almost fifty years of unavailability. Baby boomers may remember this K. Gordon Murray dubbed Mexican horror from early morning weekend viewings

on poorly broadcast UHF channels.

So, is this as good as you remember it being? Of course not, you were eight years old and pressed up against your parent's Motorola console-styled television with the sound down, trying desperately not to be heard. The thrill was getting away with staying up late, knowing that you were supposed to be getting a good night's sleep for Church the following morning. Nevertheless, this is a terrific story, with a lot of Universal-type atmospheric touches and unusual plot twists. Two doctors running an asylum for homicidal maniacs make a pact: the first one to shuffle off his mortal coil must somehow make contact and clue



the other as to what it's like to frolic amongst the dead. Dr. Aldama conveniently kicks after the opening credits, and his associate. Dr. Mazali, sets up a seance to insure that the dearly departed honors their agreement. Despite the warning that Dr. M will have to undergo terrible trials and tribulations if he wishes to boldly go where no man or woman has gone before, the good doctor agrees to walk through a door that is to open for him promptly at nine o'clock, three months hence. Dr. Aldama keeps his promise, but boy, is this a horrible decision as Dr. Mazali. on walking through the door, is promptly framed for murder, hanged, and returns in the body of a horribly disfigured corpse. The shock of returning from the dead in such a horrific state - Mazali has to claw his way out of his shroud in a badly dug grave - leaves him hopelessly insane, and, in a spectacular denouement, the doctor is

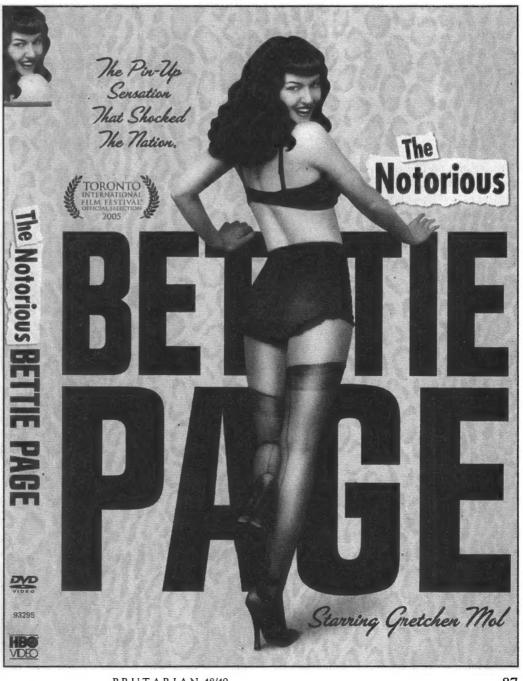
burned alive whilst attempting to pour acid on the face of the daughter of Dr. Al-The extravagances of the narrative cry out for a more measured pace; nevertheless, the film has its fair share of shocks, and our interest never flags, thanks to the outlandish screenplay and a mise en scene so suffused with dread as to be almost unbearable.



Visiting Hours - (d) Jean-Claude Lord (1981)

A lost slasher film that should have stayed lost, as it breaks all the cardinal rules of the genre. To wit: (1) it does not have an attractive heroine in the hatchet-faced, badly-aging Lee Grant: (2) the murders are fairly routine and noticeably bloodless; (3) all of the other imperiled women are even less attractive than Grant, and that's realy saying something; and (4) the stalker, played by the normally reliably creepy and

oleaginous Michael Ironside plays down his role to the point of invisibility. Throw in a predictable screenplay that makes poor use of its hospital setting, even poorer use of William Shatner as the romantic interest, and you got yourself one forgettable flick. For those of you who must know, Lee Grant is a crusading television journalist on a mission to rid the world of domestic violence. This arouses the ire of a psychopathic misogynist who is on a mission of his own: to rid the world of women. The reason? As a child, he walked in on his alcoholic father raping his mother. One would think that would align Ironside with Grant but no, the goofy screenplay has Ironside coming to the conclusion that women are vile temptresses whose innate whorishness must be punished by violation and mutilation. Meted out in the same session if the opportunity presents itself. Which it does in several per-



functory scenes, making it all the more curious, as to why Ironside feels the need to continually stalk the unappealing Grant. Wouldn't a bag lady do just as well for his purposes?



Betty Page - (d) Mary Harron (2005)

So you want to make a film about Betty Page. What's the approach? How do you see Betty? As unknowing stalking horse for sexual freedom? Or, as this is the 50s, would it be as naive icon for promiscuity and perversity? And how do we tell her story? Do we put the emphasis on Page's life or, rather, on the hidebound and repressive era in which she toiled? An intelligent filmmaker, which Ms. Harron decidedly is not, would have adroitly mixed these themes, rather than haphazardly bouncing from one to the other whenever inspiration flagged. Page and the viewer would have been better served if the screenwriters had settled on an idea fixee in regard to their subject; that is, as Page as representative, as a symbol of something, rather than as an almost inscrutable cipher. By failing to do this, the film is unable to establish a tone or a point of view.

Nor does it help that Page is revealed, tastefully, oh so tastefully, to have been a youthful victim of both rape and incest. Traumatic horrors, moreover, leaving Page relatively unscathed in this scenario. Just what are we to think in light of such an approach? How are we expected to get intellectually or emotionally involved? And just what are we to make of the raison d'etre for the film itself:

a religious innocent's descent into the demimonde of sadomasochism? Is Betty Page a cautionary tale of a prodigal returning to the faith she never truly abandoned? Or is it the portrait of a woman so psychologically damaged as to be innured to all forms of degradation? Perhaps, it is, as the filmmakers suggest at times, little more than the simple story of a lovely, good-natured girl innocently being led astray. But not too far astray, because she is really good, and the people asking her to do these naughty things are pretty nice people, and the naughty things really aren't so naughty.

Fine, Betty Page is a fairy tale. We get it, that's why the removal from the drab monochromatic world of lower Manhattan to bright technicolor Miami Beach whenever Betty takes a vacation. But then, why film any of this in black and white, for that matter? Why, too, are we continually shown Page's repeated disappointments in both acting classes and in auditions? And is it really necessary to throw the Congressional hearings on pornography into the mix? Aside from being called as a witness, and asked to wait twelve hours before being sent home without testifying, this had little bearing on Page's life. Certainly, it is not the stuff of fantasy.

Ay, there's the rub! Whimsy cannot bear very much reality. Add sex and perversity and Jesus and failure and

nudity and the lovely Gretchen Moll, and the center cannot hold. The absurd courts the vulgar, questions are raised, and the frustrating search for the there that is not there begins.



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